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The Honorable Antonio Delgado (NY-19)
Testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
October 20, 2021

Thank you to Chairwoman Luria and Ranking Member Nehls for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of my bipartisan bill, the *VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act*. I introduced this legislation with Representative Nancy Mace, a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I would like to thank her for her partnership on this important issue.

Our bill is simple: it would establish a peer support program at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). While the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has a peer support system for MST survivors and the Department of Defense has its own victim advocate program, the VBA has no similar programs. As such, MST survivors receive no formal mental health support as part of their application process at the VBA.

As many of you know, the MST claims process can be difficult for veterans and have an impact on their mental health. The application process is complicated and convoluted, and frequently requires survivors to tell and re-tell their story and how it impacts their lives. *The VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act* would ensure that survivors have trauma-informed support throughout their claims process.

I'm honored to say that my bill is endorsed by many of our nation's most prominent VSOs, including the American Legion, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and the Modern Military Association of America.

It is essential that the VA is a safe and welcoming space for all our nation's veterans, including MST survivors. It is long overdue that we create equity for trauma-informed support between the VBA and VHA. I urge the committee to join me in supporting this critical legislation.

I thank you again for holding this hearing. I am happy to answer any questions, and I yield back the balance of my time.