

**Women Veteran Social Justice Network Inc**  
**Identify Connect Empower**



**Congressional Testimony For The Record**  
**BriGette McCoy CEO**  
**Women Veteran Social Justice Network Inc.**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON**  
**DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS LEGISLATIVE HEARING**  
**STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**October 20th, 2021**

Chairwoman Luria and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you, for inviting Women Veteran Social Justice Network Inc (WVSJN) to testify at this legislative hearing.

Women Veteran Social Justice Network Inc is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that advocates inclusion, equity, and advancement of women of military service from all; eras of service, service times, and service branches. We are a volunteer, multi-platform network supporting and honoring past and present military servicewomen while equipping them for leadership in philanthropy, entrepreneurship, technology, civic community engagement, and personal economic expansion. We electronically convene with over 50 community networks through integrated information sharing and collaborative work.

Military Sexual assault survivors and survivor advocates experience a myriad of challenges navigating a world with poly traumas and seeking post-military medical care. I know because I embarked on that journey, stopping and starting, multiple times over a 20-year process. Applying for compensation claims can be a gauntlet with numerous levels and various points within the claims process, including multilayers of coordinating care and documentation. Each step can be a severely debilitating ordeal when the Veteran has a limited understanding of the claims or adjudication process, is isolated in the process, and has no one to establish a level of trust to communicate concerns in real-time. These reforms have the potential to improve the outcomes of survivors in an immediate way.

WVSJ Network Inc. favors legislation that will improve outcomes and experiences of military sexual assault survivors. Improving the quality of life of Veterans through the claims process could also be an important measure to decrease homelessness and suicide in the sexual assault community. Improvement of outreach methods, technological access efficiency, and socially connected support is needed to facilitate appropriate care to most survivors regardless of their gender identity, race, socioeconomic status, or location. With reforms in the 2022 NDAA and more community awareness, increased future claims are likely. As military personnel transition with injuries from sexual traumas, the need for up-to-date technology efficiencies and customer-focused services will become increasingly vital.

We present these recommendations for sexual assault survivors' legislation discussions and drafts. Many echo the legislation's language and spirit with a few additional thoughts. These improvements can be implemented on a small scale with the sexual assault claims process and the improvements made rolled out to benefit the larger claims community.

### **PEER SPECIALIST SUPPORT**

Peers need specialized ethics training, trauma-informed experience, personal accountability, and a network of senior peer leaders to support them.

- Improve job grade classification, skill training, and authority of Peer Support Specialists.
- Offer accompaniment to appointments for those who are just beginning their VA treatment experience. (Guides that are gender-specific for the Veteran and know how to utilize the VA system)
- Improve funding levels and increase authority for programming.
- Understanding for disability variations for Veterans with cognitive and physical disabilities.

### **OUTREACH**

Culturally responsive, survivor-centered, trauma-informed outreach practices are important for the level of impact needed to support military sexual assault survivors.

- Multi-platform electronic outreach (**Technology**)
  - Chatbot technology
  - Mobile technology
    - Texting and SMS messaging.
- No Harassment Zone
  - Make the VA and community care safe spaces to seek medical and mental health treatment by ensuring a zero-tolerance for sexual harassment, assault, on-site or electronically.

**Women Veteran Social Justice Network Inc**  
**Identify Connect Empower**

- Affirming language
  - Remove language from programs and brochures that limit survivors' access to services.
  - Include recovery-oriented care language that is non-accusatory towards the survivor.
  - Remove abbreviated terms so that experiences are not stigmatized by incomplete or inappropriate language.
- Cultural competency
  - Increase stakeholder knowledge base by utilizing 1st person narrative experiences of sexual assault survivors.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

The use of more up-to-date and integrated technology to create a seamless process has the potential to reduce the harm caused to Veterans and their families waiting through significant delays during the claims process.

Technology Impactful on claims -VBA/V

- **Provide an extra step of electronic protection of information and data for mst survivors**
  - **Add an extra step of security and anonymity from staff and programs with a need-to-know only process.**
- Utilizing text, and information dashboards to support the claim experience journey.
- Veteran Self-scheduling portals for peer support specialists scheduling.
- Streamlined digital claim process to include visual mapping for the Veteran's claim experience journey.
- Include an electronic process that utilizes technological advancements for peer leader interaction.
- Improve organizational claims completion performance by capturing and making available analytics on claims process and outcomes without a GAO report or IG investigation.
- Increase the utilization of AI and machine learning tools to aggregate data.
- **Seamless technology integrated electronic records accesses directly between VA and VBA.**
- Automated claims and scheduling platforms using AI processing to improve and track outcomes.
- Claims AI automation assessment, and management.
  - VA claims and tracking AMA process and Legacy digital electric notification connected

## **FUNDING**

Implement the appropriate funding for research, and analytics for peer specialists to be a part of the improvement process.

## **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Establish an innovator military sexual assault coalition with; cultural insight, claims process understanding, analytics reporting experience that includes Veteran survivor subject matter experts to assist in the design, development, and implementation of programs and services for survivors.**
- **Implement policies that remove additional process steps or paperwork responsibility from sexual assault patients to access healthcare claims or peer support.**

That concludes my statement. Thank you Madam Chair for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.

## **H.R. 3402, Caring for Survivors Act of 2021;**

- 1. Social security payments of the surviving spouse and dependent children to be subtracted from their assets calculation.**
- 2. Veteran's compensation goes to the surviving spouse for at least three months, allowing the surviving spouse to have housing while waiting for the VBA to process the DIC/Pension claim.**

**legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the manner in which the Board of Veterans' Appeals conducts hearings regarding claims involving military sexual trauma and to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve the language and practices of the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to such claims (discussion draft);**

- 1. Hire more Women professionals with Trauma and Military culture training to do the evaluation.**
- 2. Change the level of input given when it comes to the evaluation. Treating a mental health provider should have a 70% weight, and the contracted doctor the Veteran sees for 30 mins should only have a 30% impact on the decision.**
- 3. Mandating that the decision of the survivor to excel is not equal to an indication that the assault did not happen. Some women/males will dig in and become high**

***Women Veteran Social Justice Network Inc***  
***Identify Connect Empower***

**functioning military members and rise to high ranks at sacrificing all family connections to ensure that they will not be taken advantage of. This behavior is often listed in the VBA Narrative as "no impact was seen after the reported incident."**

**H.R. 4601, Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act;**

**Allow the state to build affordable housing with the money. Set up State Veteran Outreach Centers in Rural areas with wrap-around services. Allow state hospitals to provide warm hand-offs to V.A. Health Care Facilities with a standardized dual/partnership ROI form. Expand Mental Health care and include inpatient Drug and Alcohol recovery programs.**