



## **STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS  
WITH RESPECT TO A HEARING ON**

### **H.R. 1753 Jax Act**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

October 24, 2023

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member Pappas, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) appreciates the opportunity to submit a Statement for the Record on today's hearing that includes H.R. 1753 Jax Act. SWAN is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) that represents over 10,000 servicewomen and women veterans regardless of rank, military branch, or years of experience. SWAN has specifically worked to transform military culture and reform veteran services focusing since 2009 on opening all occupations to qualified women, holding sex offenders accountable in the military justice system, expanding access to services for a broad range of reproductive health care, and eliminating barriers to women's disability claims especially for those who have experienced military sexual trauma as well as barriers to those who experienced combat injuries but whose experience is not correctly documented in their service records.

Today we want to acknowledge the efforts of the bi-partisan co-sponsors of the Jax Act to recognize the combat contributions of some of the women who served in OIF/OEF. These women served on Cultural Support Teams with Special Operations Command units during the Global War on Terror from 2010-2021. These women served alongside their male counterparts

and suffered casualties, but have not been fully recognized or credited for this dangerous and essential service. Unfortunately, their service was seldom appropriately documented so they have faced arduous barriers to receiving the care and benefits they earned. It is especially important that those who were in the Guard and Reserves are given everything they earned.

While we recognize this legislation is a significant step forward for service women and women veterans, we also have to emphasize an often-forgotten point that U.S. History is filled with women who have served with or in the military under fire – many have been killed, wounded, and/or taken as POWs, and they too have not received adequate or appropriate care or full credit.<sup>1</sup> All of these women helped open opportunities for qualified women further in 2013-2016 when the combat exclusion officially ended and since then.<sup>2</sup>

The women of the Cultural Support Teams are fully deserving of the recognition and benefits this bill will provide. SWAN, however, must emphatically insist that this bill includes their predecessors-sisters of all the Services who served on Team Lioness and the Female Engagement Teams (FETs).<sup>3</sup> These are the women from all the Services who served with USMC and Army ground combat units in 2003-2010 in Iraq and Afghanistan who pioneered and paved the way for the CST missions with the Special Operations Forces in 2010-2021. These women who volunteered (seldom receiving training or appropriate equipment) in the immediacy of war conditions served beside their male peers. These women, too, have earned (1) the correction of their records to document service in combat; (2) appropriate care and benefits; and, (3) the awards, recognition, and respect that have been denied them for so many years. Most importantly, these women increased the efficiency and effectiveness of field units as well as military readiness and the recruiting numbers for the All Volunteer Force (AVF).<sup>4</sup>

**This oversight can be easily corrected by expanding H.R. 1753 to specifically include the Lioness Teams and FET members from 2003-2010.** They too provided critical intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*, Novato: Presidio Press, 1992 (revised edition). We see this particularly starting in Desert Shield/Storm and through the changes in combat exclusion laws and policies and military restrictions that confronted commanders' realities "on the ground" starting in 1994. One only has to mention Jessica Lynch and Lori Piestewa to spark this recognition. See also Lorry M. Fenner, "Either You Need These Women or You Do Not: Informing the Debate on Military Service and Citizenship," *Gender Issues*, Summer 1998, Vol 6., Number 3, ed. Rita J. Simon, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University. Lorry M. Fenner and Marie DeYoung, *Women in Combat: Civic Duty or Military Liability*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, and "Women in Combat: Civic Duty or Military Liability?," C-SPAN Videotape 166695 Part 1 of 1, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Service Women's Action Network, *Women in the Military: Where They Stand*, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition 2019, pp.12-16 (<https://www.servicewomensactionnetwork.org/swan-research>). See also Ellen Haring, "Gender and Military Organizations, in Chantal de Jonge Oudrat and Michael Brown, eds, *The Gender and Security Agenda: Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pp. 90-112.

<sup>3</sup> Meg McLaren and Daria Sommers, "Lioness: The Origins Story," *Veterans Breakfast Club Podcast*, particularly Episode 5 with CAPT Lory Manning USN, Retired, Women's Research and Education Institute and Shannon Morgan, Army Combat Veteran, August 24, 2023. Meg McLaren and Daria Sommers, *Lioness* (IMDb documentary), 2008, currently available on Amazon Prime.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Percy, *Forgotten Warriors: The Long History of Women in Combat*, New York: Basic Books, 2023, especially pp. 268-281.

to U.S. and allied forces as well as interacted with local populations where and when their male counterparts could not effectively do so. A different kind of conflict that required winning “hearts and minds” could not have been waged effectively without these women. They too fired weapons, protected their teammates, and faced death, injury, and disability. Army women first joined U.S. Marine Corps ground combat units for raids on locations where Iraqi women and children might be present. Later, Marines and Sailors participated in Lioness operations with both Marine and Army units. Let us never forget those women who fought for the first time in close combat in Ramadi when that was not technically allowed by law, and those who died in Fallujah, Holly Ann Charette, 21, and Ramona M. Valdez, 20, in 2005 or the others who died like Marine Cpl Jennifer M. Parcell in Anbar in 2007, or those who suffered seen and unseen injuries and yet have not received due recognition. Even by 2005, 39 female U.S. troops had died in Iraq along with three Defense Department women, and six servicewomen had died in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

Again, SWAN greatly appreciates the recognition of the women who served with Special Forces from 2010-2021 during OIF/OEF in HR 1735 Jax Act and its Senate companion. Now the sponsors have the opportunity to broaden this vital legislation in at least a small way. It should include the women of Team Lioness, from various specialties who were thrown into action with the USMC starting in 2004, and the women in the Female Engagement Teams, introduced first by Task Force Leatherneck in Afghanistan in 2009. These are the women who laid the ground work and inspiration for the Cultural Support Teams earlier. None of these women should ever be forgotten.

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<sup>5</sup> “Female Troops in Iraq Exposed to Combat: Despite ban on women in combat, the front line in Iraq is everywhere, *CNN*, June 28, 2005.