

**Statement of**  
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**Before the Committee on Veterans Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**  
**U. S. House of Representatives**  
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Chairman Levin and Ranking Member Moore and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to present my recommendations on improvements that should be made to ease the transition of women veterans from the military back to civilian life.

Women veterans transitioning into civilian life often experience difficulties in establishing relationships, especially with other women as non-military, women especially in the workplace to not understand the experiences of the military. Compounding the issue is that society still does not recognize women as veterans. Too often I hear stories from decorated women veterans about how they were harassed for parking in a veteran's parking spot or how they are never asked if they are a veteran while out to dinner for the hero discount, but their non-veteran male spouse is almost every time. More needs to be done to help solidify the image of a woman in uniform as part of the fabric of this nation's call to service.

1. Exit Recruiter – Just as it takes time to get in the military and a recruiter holds your hand to choose your job, walk you through the paperwork, etc., a similar program should exist for those leaving the service. Create a discharge sponsorship program similar to transferring to a new base. Exiting base administrator would contact the receiving state department VA. The program would be designed to provide support for six months: last three months before exiting the military and three months after exiting the military to include medical, mental, housing, employment, legal, educational information, as well as connection to local VSOs and organizations that provide programs for women veterans. I am aware that some of this information is currently provided. However, women are often mothers and wives, and are often focused on transitioning the family as well as themselves from the military; therefore, may overlook this important information as they put the welfare of others before themselves without considering issues they may encounter.
2. Continued Mental Health Counseling – Women in the military who have experienced military sexual trauma (MST) often have not discussed the trauma while serving, and when exiting the military, they do not have the confidence to discuss it with family

members which leads to broken relationships, drugs, alcohol, homelessness, and abusive relationships.

Women who have experienced (MST) or any other trauma that could result in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) should receive mental health counseling after leaving the military. The military should provide a safe environment for these women to share any trauma they have experienced that will affect their successful re-entry to the civilian life.

3. VA Sponsor - Have a VA Sponsor who greets women as they check into the VA for the first time. Give them a tour, share with them the benefits they are entitled to and how to seek them. The Sponsor should provide a list of additional resources that are available to them, including where they can get additional support such as the VET Center, Women's Coordinator at state Department of Veterans Affairs, or local organizations that support women veterans, such as Lady Veterans Connect. The sponsor could also provide a welcome letter and packet from the women's coordinator at the local VA.
4. Public Awareness – More needs to be done to educate the public that women served in the military and should be recognized for their service the same as the men. Women veterans do not tend to identify as veterans; therefore, rather than asking “are you a veteran?” the question should be “did you serve in the military?”.
5. Work Experience and Job Placement - Women veterans need assistance transferring their work experience from the military to the private sector that will allow them to support their families.
6. Homelessness - VA research has found “women veterans are more than twice as likely to become homeless as women who did not serve in the military. Additionally, 1-2% of women veterans and 13-15% of women veterans living in poverty will experience homelessness over the course of a year” (Vantage Point, 2020). Women veterans are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (Military.com, 2018). Once women veterans become homeless, they are difficult to reach as they blend into the homeless population and do not identify as veterans. They often are not considered as being homeless as they become “couch surfers” staying with friends, family members, or temporary relationships with men. Again, I must stress here the importance of changing the language to asking, “are you a veteran?” to ensure these women are identified as veterans and provide the services they have earned as veterans. Homeless veterans are better equipped at disappearing from the public eye based on their experience in the military, making it much more difficult to reach them and connecting them to housing and programs that restore them to being the proud women they were while serving in the military.

7. Lady Veterans Connect will soon implement a “Battle Buddy” program to connect women veterans together, provide them support and programs to be sustainable, and connect them to a battle buddy for support. This will surround the women veterans with a support system to address issues that are important to them and to other women veterans.
  
8. Lady Veterans Connect desires to make our home in Winchester a place where women exiting the military who do not have a job or home to go to can come to “Anna’s House” and transition from there. While living in the home they will receive help in preparing for a job, identify jobs that fit their experience in the military, receive financial planning and other programs that will allow women to become successful in their careers and in establishing relationships with family members and other women who have served in the military. Lady Veterans Connect isn’t satisfied with only reacting to the of women veteran homelessness, we aim to be so proactive that we prevent it from ever happening.