

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2019

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310

The Honorable Richard V. Spencer
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Esper and Secretary Spencer:

We write to request that the Department of the Army and Department of the Navy collaborate with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by participating in the VA's Women's Health Transition Assistance Program pilot. Both the quantitative and qualitative data from the pilot program show that the program has great potential to improve the health care and long-term life outcomes for our women veterans. However, only the Air Force is fully executing the program. We ask all the services to participate in this already fully operational pilot program.

We know that women veterans face different health-related challenges, including depression, chronic pain, and obesity, compared to their male counterparts. According to the VA, the age-adjusted suicide rate for women veterans is nearly two times higher than the rate for civilian women. For women veterans who do not use Veteran Health Administration (VHA) services, the rate of suicide is even higher. However, for women veterans who are VHA users, there is no statistical difference with civilian women. With this in mind, it is especially alarming that women veterans do not connect with VA services until an average of 2.7 years after separating from the military.

A primary barrier to post-service care for women veterans is lack of awareness of VA services. Additionally, many women veterans have misperceptions regarding their eligibility for VA health care and about the quality of care available at the VA. This contributes to lower enrollment and utilization of VA health care among women veterans compared to their male counterparts.

The Women's Health Transition Assistance Program, which is now being piloted, aims to increase awareness about the VA's gender-specific health care services among women transitioning out of active military service. Ultimately, the program seeks to enroll more women veterans into the VA health care system as quickly as possible after separation from the military to ensure continuation of health care services.

The four-hour training is presented by a woman veteran currently receiving health care at the VA. Of the nearly 300 women who have participated, 99 percent would recommend the course to others and 80 percent have agreed to post-course follow-up. Post-course survey data indicate a 56 percent improvement in awareness among participants of women's health services at the VHA. Further, there was an increase of 13.1 percent in intent to enroll with the VA, an increase

of 15.6 percent in intent to use VA health care services, and an increase of 19.3 percent in intent to use VA suicide prevention services, if needed.

The Air Force Women's Health Initiative is working diligently to implement the pilot program and has completed nearly 40 trainings in the past nine months across the country. The Army has conducted a few initial training sessions, all held at Joint Base Lewis-McCord in Washington. We are encouraging the Army to expand the pilot program at other bases and encourage the Navy to follow suit as soon as possible. Robust participation of each service in the pilot program will help the VA collect the data it needs to expand and improve the program to reach a greater population of women veterans.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data from the first few months show that the pilot program has great potential to improve the health care and long-term life outcomes for our women veterans. We ask for your support of this pilot program and other efforts to equip women transitioning from active service with the information and resources they need to make informed choices about their veterans benefits and health care options. We ask all the services to put forth a good faith effort to ensure robust participation in this already fully operational pilot program and to prioritize care for our women veterans.

Sincerely,



CHRISSEY HOULAHAN
Member of Congress



MIKIE SHERRILL
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress



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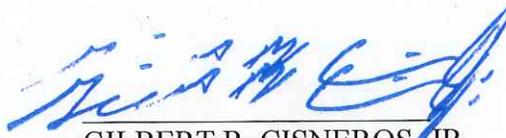
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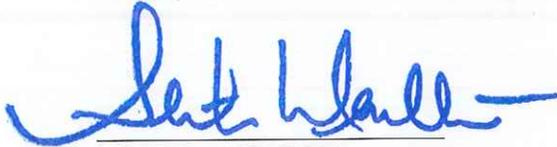
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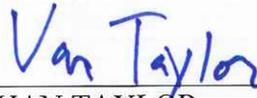
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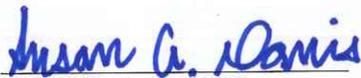
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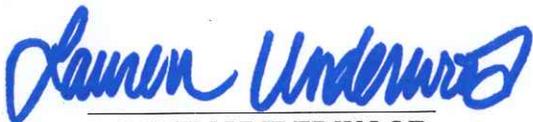
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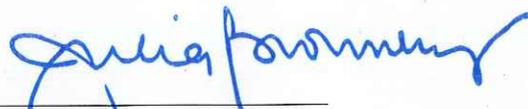
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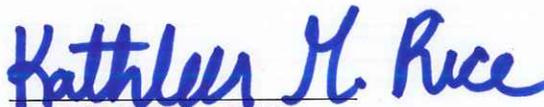
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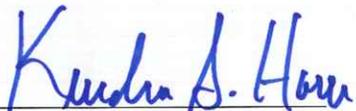
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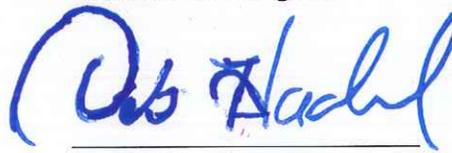
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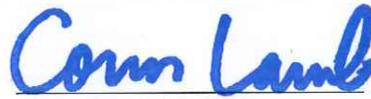
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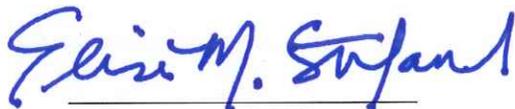
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