

Chair and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, my name is Dan Fortune and I am a close friend of somebody who suffered MST. I stand before you today to offer a firm recommendation in favor of LD 662, An Act to Fund Military Sexual Trauma Liaisons. Having seen the damage that MST has inflicted on survivors, I feel that this bill is not only necessary but also most humane and needed for their recovery and healing.

The Crucial Role Played by MST Liaisons:

Military sexual trauma represents a deep violation of trust with long-lasting and often disabling consequences. Survivors encounter special difficulties accessing labyrinthine systems of care, such as healthcare, legalities, and veterans' benefits. MST Liaisons play an essential role in spanning these chasms, providing individualized support and a life-giving human connection.

Specifically, MST Liaisons:

- Give vital information and resources: They link survivors to the right healthcare providers, mental healthcare, legal services, and support groups. They act as a gateway through the frequently perplexing list of services available.
- Provide advocacy and emotional support: They provide a confidential and safe environment where survivors can discuss their experiences and are offered empathetic support. They also advocate for survivors within the VA system and other organizations, so that they are heard.
- Simplify claims and benefits: They walk survivors through the normally arduous process of applying for VA disability compensation and other benefits, cutting through red tape and simplifying it.
- Coordinate care among multiple providers: They provide coordinated and comprehensive care to the survivors by developing collaborative relationships with health professionals, mental health service providers, and other support services to build a collective support network.
- Reduce barriers to seeking help: The presence of certain liaisons can go a long way in eliminating the fear and stigma of reporting MST and asking for help, creating an atmosphere of trust and understanding.

Funding is an Investment in Healing:

Funding MST Liaisons is not a line-item budgetary choice; it is an investment in the lives of our veterans. It is a statement that acknowledges the seriousness of the impact of MST and declares that we are committed to providing survivors with the specialized care they need and deserve. I do know survivors of MST, and I stand with them in their entitlement to heal and a life free from the burden of their trauma. A Call to Action: This is not a jobs bill; this is a bill about extending a lifeline to individuals who have served our nation and suffered unimaginable trauma. This is about acknowledging the human cost of doing nothing and opting to help those most in need. I ask that you vote in favor of LD 662 and offer the resources MST survivors require to heal, recover, and take back their lives. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Fortune