



Sisters in Arms Center
From Our Home to Theirs
Emergency Housing for Military Sexual Trauma Survivors
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Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and members of the committee. My name is John Crowley, and I am the Vice President of the board for the Sisters in Arms Center. I'm submitting testimony to support **LD 117 "An Act to Provide Funding For Sexual Assault Services."**

I am a native Mainer. I spent 20 years in the military as a pilot, first in the Marine Corps and later in the Maine Army National Guard. More recently, I worked as a Forest Ranger Pilot for the Maine Forest Service and retired as the Chief Ranger Pilot after 20 years.

I have volunteered with the SiAC since its opening in 2014, mostly as a member of the board of directors, but also maintaining the property and fundraising. We have a small, but active board that is dedicated to maintaining a safe and comfortable environment for female veterans and their kids.

There is a common thread that runs between most of our veterans at SiAC. They have dealt with or are dealing with post-traumatic stress from military sexual trauma, which often leads to substance use disorder, or some type of mental health issue. We know there is little available housing in Maine, and studies by the VA have shown that often, women vets do better in congregate housing, alongside other veterans who have had similar experiences as their own. The VA data on military sexual trauma (MST) is shocking: 1 in 3 women veterans have experienced MST. There is a direct link between completed suicide and MST survivors. **At the same time, it often takes up to six months for veterans to be seen in the mental health section of the Maine VA.** Advocates are crucial for ensuring that survivors are not left behind and buried in systems.

Sisters in Arms has worked with MECASA for the past three years, since our executive director was appointed to the Governor's Advisory Council on Military Sexual Trauma. They have provided a conduit between the National Guard, local law enforcement, and non-profit organizations that provide mental health services. While our executive director is a licensed clinical social worker with experience dealing with trauma and sexual assault, we don't have enough personnel for her to deal with the advocacy required for all our veterans, and that is where we use the services of MECASA. They

provide that advocacy and assist with accommodation needed by our veterans at work and at school. They are a force multiplier for us, as we provide other services in addition to mental health support. This assistance is imperative when we live in a time where more advocacy is needed, not less.

- **1 in 3 women veterans have experienced military sexual trauma**
- **1 in 50 male veterans have experiences MST**
- **Estimated 5,000 MST survivors in Maine**
- **Women veterans who experienced MST are twice as likely to be homeless**
- **Veteran suicide largely associated with a history of MST**