



**Sisters in Arms Center**

*From Our Home to Theirs: Emergency Housing for Women Veterans*

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Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica 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 here today to support **LD 662 "An Act to Fund Military Sexual Trauma Liaisons."**

I am a native Mainer, and I spent ten years as a Marine Corps officer, where I flew helicopter gunships, and did my first tour in Iraq. I spent my last three years on active duty running the Navy Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) school at Brunswick Naval Air Station. After leaving active duty, I joined the Maine Army National Guard and flew assault and MEDEVAC helicopters as a Chief Warrant Officer. I made a second tour to Iraq in 2003 – 2004. I retired in 2006. 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 as the lawn mower, leak fixer, and chief dog sitter. We have a small, but active board that is dedicated to maintaining a safe and comfortable environment for female veterans and their kids.

While working in and round the house, I've had the opportunity to get to know most of the veterans that we've helped. There is a common thread that runs between almost all of them. They have dealt with or are dealing with post-traumatic stress, military sexual trauma, addiction, or some type of mental health issue. While one would think that there would be federal funding for the type of work that we do, there just isn't. The VA works on the model of housing first. Get veterans off the street and into a home, and they can deal with the rest of the issues later. In many cases that works, but we all know that there is little available housing in Maine, and studies by the VA have shown that often, women vets do better in congregate housing, alongside women who have had similar experiences as their own.

We have survived as an agency for the past ten years and kept the doors open, mostly through donations, with some help from the Maine Bureau of Veterans Affairs, and Maine Housing. Our donors tend to be veterans' organizations from around the state, including the American Legion, and the VFW, mostly through their auxiliaries and the Legion Riders.

Much of this time we were staffed completely by volunteers, but last year we were able to hire our current Executive Director, and we've been able to assist twice as many veterans then usual. In the last ten years, we've shown that we are a reliable steward of donated and state funding, but to do more of the work that should be done, we need help. The requirements of applying for federal or state funding, involve manpower that we don't have. Our ED can't ensure that we are following the edicts of a grant to the letter, when she is dealing with an issue involving the house or moving a new veteran and her dog into our program on Thanksgiving Day. There just aren't enough hours in the day for one person to do that work. We need to do more for our veterans, and funding LD 662 would allow the Sisters in Arms Center to do that.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

**LD 662 would provide significant funding for the Sisters in Arms Center, a nonprofit that provides housing to homeless women veterans and their children. The funding would be to provide therapist, house manager, per diem night time/back up worker, part-time administrator, and executive director pay to support MST victims, women veterans and their children. The funding would also support an MST liaison for MECASA.**

- **Data: Children are a significant additional struggle for women veterans who are homeless- we are the only shelter that provides services exclusively for women veterans and their children in Maine**
- **Data: 1 in 3 women veterans have experienced military sexual trauma**
- **Data: Women veterans who experienced MST are twice as likely to be homeless**
- **Data: We have seen a recent spike in women veteran suicide largely associated with a history of MST (need for therapist)**
- **10,000 women veterans in the state of Maine**
- **Data derived from the Dept. of Veteran Affairs research**