

Hello and Good morning, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and the honorable members of the VLA Committee,

My name is Dr. Casidhe Daniels, a clinical social worker and traumatologist deeply committed to exploring the impacts of complex trauma. My previous work in military environments conveyed a critical issue: military sexual trauma (MST). According to U.S. Code 1720D, MST is defined as “a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment (unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in character) that occurred while a former member of the Armed Forces was on duty, regardless of their duty status or line of duty determination” (Galovski et al., 2022).

Recent statistics from the Department of Veterans Affairs indicate that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 50 men report experiencing MST when screened by their VA provider (Military Sexual Trauma Fact Sheet - VA Mental Health, 2021). While these numbers may seem alarming, it is essential to understand that MST remains one of the most underreported experiences among service members, largely due to fears of retaliation, skepticism about being believed, and the stigma surrounding blame (Galovski et al., 2022).

Survivors of MST often face a multitude of barriers when seeking care, including societal stigmas, difficulties accessing services—especially for rural veterans—and a general reluctance to seek help after their experiences (Kelly, 2021). A major reason many survivors hesitate to pursue support is the institutional betrayal they may encounter after their trauma. Research by Monteith et al. (2024) demonstrates that many MST survivors prefer seeking assistance outside of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) environments. This highlights the urgent need for increased funding and appropriate services to support these individuals. Fortunately, the state of Maine is making strides in addressing this issue with the recent passage of H.P. 430, An Act to Fund Military Sexual Trauma Liaisons. This progress emphasizes the critical need for enhanced community support.

The Sister in Arms Center (SIAC) and MECASA is at the forefront of providing this vital support, particularly for women veterans and those experiencing homelessness. The National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs (2025) has reported that women represent the largest demographic of homeless veterans, making organizations like SIAC and MECASA indispensable for community aid. By offering shelter and comprehensive support, SIAC empowers individuals to regain stability and work toward self-sufficiency.

Thank you for taking the time to hear about the critical importance of these funds for organizations like SIAC and MECASA. They are dedicated to tackling the issue of female veteran homelessness, and I hope you will consider them as a potential recipient for this grant. Your support can make a significant difference in their efforts to empower and uplift these brave individuals.

Thank you for your considerations in where these funds can go and your continued support.

References

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