

Good morning to Vice Chair and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee,

My name is Se Mi Maaliyah Anderson. I come here today in support of LD 662 in many supporting roles. First, as a female Marine Corps Veteran, a formerly incarcerated individual, A survivor of MST and DV, a mother, daughter, a former resident of Sisters in Arms womens veterans transitional house, A veteran advocate and case manager, and a supportive role to see the success of such organizations as Sisters in Arms while I grow my non-profit to align to common values, morals, and ethics learned when i resided in the Sisters in Arms house.

My background of incarceration to my transition of re-entry back into the community started with Sisters in Arms Women Veteran Housing. They were a big part in my journey in transition of a safe place to decompress from incarceration and adapt properly to being back in the community in a healthy environment with like-minded women veterans that needed to heal the same invisible scars left from trauma, SA, MST, DV, childhood trauma, generational trauma, and addiction. With each piece of community, camaraderie, sisterhood, I was able to reestablish pieces of myself to be realigned to who I used to be and need to be. For that I can gladly say I am giving back as a veteran case manager while walking this path with them of healing, reinstatement of custody, physical and financial stability, sobriety, and watching my quality of life and peace grow. We need these Military sexual trauma Liasons to be established.

The Roles and benefits of MST Liaisons:

- They provide vital information and resources, linking survivors to the right healthcare providers, mental health services, legal services, and support groups. They act as a gateway through the frequently perplexing list of services available. They provide a judgment-free space to heal and work on desensitizing triggers.

- 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.

Many people don't understand that the critical roles of Military sexual trauma liaisons establish emotional, psychological, physiological, physical safety for those needing to re-center, re-balance. I have seen significant improvements for others, to include their quality of life changing for the better and restoration of healthier relationships. Granted, many, including myself, needed the proper supports to heal these many entities. Though the progress to healing these pathways varies among many men and women, having these resources is essential for guided support to have the strength to be vulnerable and heal these uncomfortable parts of each individual. Many resources that can be used are workshops, including treatment programs like Equine therapy like the Brockton VAMC in Massachusetts's MST program, Facilitated with the Equine Immersion Project and Tara Mahoney.

By implementing safe pathways like this, we pave a pathway to establish that we see you and we got you and not just your six. We see you as parents, sisters, aunts, cousins, family, veteran, and service member. We are here for your journey and you are not alone.

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 both inside and out. 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 as well as being one myself, 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.

Semper Fidelis,

Se Mi Maaliyah Anderson

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Executive Director

Windows of Hope: Pathways 4 Veterans' Wellness Transitional Housing

“The goal of recovery is not to become normal. The goal is to embrace human vocation of becoming more deeply human.” -Patricia Deegan