

Benjamin Collings
Portland
LD 662

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee,

I am Benjamin Collings from Fort Kent, now residing in Portland. I am here to urge to support LD 662 "An Act to Fund Military Sexual Trauma" and further, kindly request you prioritize this legislation to be included in the baseline budget ongoing when you vote on the biennial budget. For anyone not involved with this policy proposal from the past session, this legislation is based on the recommendations from the Governor's Advisory Council of Military Sexual Trauma.

In the prior session, legislation to enact funding of the liaison positions was passed in this committee with strong support endorsed overwhelmingly by the House and the Senate, and championed by the Republicans and most Democrats on the Appropriations committee.

Unfortunately, due to delays and some dysfunction at the end of last year's session, this initiative that is critical to protecting those who serve our nation, the Executive and Legislative branch failed to allow the positive outcome virtually everyone at the state capital expected.

We know that a very high percentage of girls and women have been sexually assaulted in our country, as well as boys and men. We also know there are high rates of under-reporting due to stigma, shame, and trauma.

Most of us know someone who has been sexually assaulted, many who are reading this testimony have been victims themselves. Yet, we spent so little of our resources as a state to address this crisis that impacts so many.

Furthermore, we know that there has been an ongoing problem in the military that this legislation seeks to address. The high percentage of assault incidents among enlisted women as well as a concerning level reported by men, demands our full attention and no further Legislative delays to provide the very minimal level of funding.

In addition to the trauma experienced by those assaulted while serving our nation, our brave heroes also often carry the compounding trauma derived from their combat and non combat experiences serving and protecting our state, nation, and world.

Our veterans do so much, ask for so little in return, and don't receive very much from our state budget. Our nation in general spends trillions on war and our military machine, yet for some reason can't seem to appropriate the full amount to take care of our veterans at home. While Maine's government doesn't have the resources of our federal government, we can easily afford to fund this very minimal request, especially knowing we spend so little to assist thousands of veterans and in general - hundreds of thousands who experience sexual assault.

In my opening remarks I referenced a request to prioritize this initiative in the biennial budget, now as I conclude, I believe I should compel you rather to include this in your supplemental budget.

Many veterans, specifically women who have been assaulted, have been expecting the state to provide this funding in the budget since June, 2023 after the recommendation from the Governor's Advisory Council. This is almost 2 years of desperately waiting. Some of these women are homeless, many suffering from substance abuse and mental health, often these assaulted veterans battle PTSD and thoughts of suicide. They gave us all and yet have experienced the cruelest of realities. It is for them I kindly asked the leaders of Maine to act now and immediately include this funding in the baseline budget. As Bob Dylan said: "Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?"

Thank you for your consideration. I continue to pray for the best outcome for those who serve our military, those of you serving in the Legislature, and all who reside in

Maine.

With best wishes,
Ben