

**Women Veteran United Committee, Inc.
CTL DOM Group, Inc.
JVC of Maryland Women Veterans Legislative Committee
Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council**

**January 31st & February 1st, 2022
2:00 pm - 6:00 pm**

**GI Bills Regarding Male/Female Veterans
Racial Disparities & Protecting Our Families**

**Given by Delegate Edith Patterson, Chair
Maryland Women's Caucus, Women Veterans Committee**

SUMMARY

The *GI Bill Regarding Male/Female Veterans Racial Disparities* Forum with Senator Chris Van Hollen as the keynote speaker included a roundtable discussion regarding critical topics for Male and Female Veterans. Other bills discussed were: S 287 Deliver Respectful Maternal Health Care; S 334 IMPACT to Save Moms Act; S 367 National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month; S 484 Moms Matter Act; S 1042 Kira Johnson Act; and S 796 Protecting Moms Who Served Act. The Bill to Study Disparities, S1031/HR 3856, was signed into Public Law on November 30, 2021. This Bill requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study to assess whether there are disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to (1) compensation benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); (2) disability ratings determined by the VA; and (3) the rejection of fully developed claims for VA benefits. The Maryland Women's Memorial Bill, HR 0167, is to study a Commission for a Memorial dedicated to Maryland Women Veterans. Attendance to the Forum included representatives from Washington, DC, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, Georgia, California, other Stakeholders and Veteran Service Organization.

**GI Bills Regarding Male/Female Veterans
Racial Disparities & Protecting Our Families**

Moderator: Tiffany Daniel

Keynote Speaker: Senator Chris Van Hollen

Guest Speakers:

Delegate Heather Bagnall

Delegate Michael J. Rogers

Attendees:

Dr. JoAnn Fisher, CEO, Women Veterans United Committee, Inc., Chair, JVC Maryland
Women Veterans Legislative Committee, AMVETS, Delegate JVC of Maryland

Spencer Knoll, Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen

PDC Andy Martel, AMETS, Joint Veterans Committee of Maryland

Patricia A. Craig, MA, MPP, Chairperson, Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council, Co-
Chairperson, VISN 05 Collaboration of Councils

Denise Bice

Gunny Curtis Jones, Commander of American Legion Cook-Pinkney Post 141, Commander
DAV Chapter 3 in Annapolis, MD, & Veteran's Chair for the AAC Chapter of the NAACP,
Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council DC & MD VAMC

Irma Cooper

Jonathan Hans Kirby, Veterans Mental Advisory Council @ DC VAMC

Maurice Harrison, CEO & Founder of Peer Outreach Solutions, Inc. (The POSi); Veterans
Mental Health Advisory Council @ DC VAMC

LaJuana Bennett

Latia Suttle, Chairperson of the Veterans Affairs Committee of the Beverly Hills Branch of the
NAACP & Member National Association of Black Military Women

Lorna Chatmon

Lucretia Mclenney, Director, Virginia Center for Minority Veterans at Department of Veterans
Affairs

Phyllis Fisher, WVUCI, Director of the South, North Carolina

Princess Facen, President, National Association of Black Military Women

Steven Jenkins, Veterans Mental Advisory Council @ DC VAMC, CMO of Peer Outreach Solutions, Inc. (The POSi)

William L. Trotter, Maryland State Commander, American Legion

Dr. Tweila Rochelle-Cauther, Commander American Legion Post 2 Washington, DC

Moariaso

Dr. Cathy Bennett-Santos, National Alliance of Women Veterans, Inc.

Victor Lamar Johnson, CEO, Veteran & Community Outreach Foundation

Avis Dillard-Bullock, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, JMA

Joseph A. Martin, Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council @ DC VAMC; Combat Veterans Association

Harry Depollar, Commander, Combat Veterans Association

Judge Devlin, DAV, Marine Corp League, Joint Veterans Committee of Maryland

Gloria Dent, Chief of Staff for Del Mike Rogers

Mike Mahoney, President Joint Veterans Committee of Maryland & PDC Maryland AMVETS

Annette Johnson

Dana S. Burl, Director, Outreach and Advocacy Program, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Keisha Dixon, NAACP, CA

Porsche Williams, CEO, Restore Life LLC, Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council @ DC VAMC

Mike Moses, State Commander National Association of Black Veterans

Lachrisha Parker, Military Women's Memorial, Alexandria, Virginia

Victor Lamar Johnson, Executive Director, CEO, & Founder, Veteran & Community Outreach Foundation, State of Georgia

Nachee Miller, DAV Past Department Commander, District of Columbia

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REPORT

Day 1 of the two-day GI Bill Regarding Male/Female Veterans Racial Disparities Round Table Symposium

Senator Chris Van Hollen opened the Forum with the continued discussion and update legislature for Women Veterans beginning with the not yet passed *Deborah Sampson Act*. He first spoke with WVUCI on Friday, November 16, 2018, *In Celebration of Veteran's Day, Women Who Serve, Women Who Lead Symposium*.

The Symposium was organized by Senator Van Hollen and given by Women Veterans United Committee, Inc., Joint Veterans Committee of Maryland (WVUCI), The American Legion Department of Maryland (AL), National Association of Black Veterans (NABVETS), Disabled American Veterans(DAV), and the Joint Veterans Commission of Maryland (JVC) at American Legion Post 108, 3608 Legion Drive, Cheverly, MD 20785. He spoke on the Debra Sampson Act with an excellent panel discussion of Michele S. Jones, First African American Female Sergeant Major of the Army Reserves (Ret.), Maj. Gen (MD) Linda Singh, Maryland Army National Guard, and Joy Ilem, Director, DAV Legislative Director.

As our Forum, keynote speaker Senator Van Hollen was so on point by not just speaking to the bills already on the agenda but also updated us on the Debra Sampson Act introduced by Senator Susan Eggman. The Deborah Sampson Act, passed into law in January 2021, helped us address the needs of women Veterans. It created a dedicated Office of Women's Health at VA, expanded reintegration and readjustment group counseling retreats, and bolstered call center services for Women Veterans.

Our forum was well attended by male and female leaders from Veteran Service Organizations from various states and Maryland. Senator Van Hollen is well versed in Women Veterans needs as he works intensely with Bills for Women Veterans. He gave a deeper dive into critical topics for Male and Female Veterans. He had a clear focus on Women Veterans Bills. We were interested in:

- S 287 Deliver Respectful Maternal Health Care
- S 334 IMPACT to Save Moms Act
- S 367 National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month
- S 484 Moms Matter Act
- S 1042 Kira Johnson Act
- S 796 Protecting Moms Who Served Act.

He did an excellent presentation of what's next for Women Veterans and took time to answer all questions presented to him on the topics.

Open discussion began with Moderator Tiffany Daniel guiding the attendees. From there we moved on to the Mom's Matter Act (S 484/HR 909), to establish a program to award grants to eligible entities to address maternal mental health conditions and substance use disorders with respect to pregnant and postpartum individuals, with a focus on racial and ethnic minority groups, and for other purposes and the Kira Johnson Act (S 1042/HR 1212) This bill establishes grants to improve maternal health outcomes for racial and ethnic minority groups and other underserved populations. Which really opened eyes to the challenges, disparities, morbidity and at times total neglect of women. Specifically, women of color. Which also led us to HR 3047, Military Mom's Matter Act - to improve postpartum care for members of the Armed Forces.

We later introduced to the group the Bill to Study Disparities (S1031/HR 3856) this bill was signed into PL on 30Nov21. This bill requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study to assess whether there are disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to (1) compensation benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); (2) disability ratings determined by the VA; and (3) the rejection of fully developed claims for VA benefits. The GAO must also develop recommendations to facilitate better data collection on such disparities associated with race and ethnicity. The open discussion was superb and brought up several areas of concern to include the following.

- Past Data
- Past Studies
- MST/PTSD
- Death of a child
- Morbidity
- Breast feeding
- APFT after childbirth
- Assistive reproductive systems
- Back pay from disability claims
- Doulas and Midwives

Day 2 of the two-day GI Bill Regarding Male/Female Veterans Racial Disparities Round Table Symposium

We hit the ground running with the Military Community and Family. During this discussion we intentionally brought out topics that only military families endure, and the mention of the survey conducted in 2021 by the Blue Star Families. Such as:

- Health care
- Relocating
- Schools
- Disabled children
- Advocates
- Family counseling
- Finances, living below middle-class

The Women's Memorial (HR 0167) is to establish a Commission to study establishing a memorial dedicated to Maryland Women Veterans and requiring the Commission to submit a preliminary report on its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by February 1, 2023, and a final report by September 30, 2023.

- A memorial currently exists in Cecil County at the Chesapeake Travel Lodge. See hearing [Committees - Media \(maryland.gov\)](#) where Delegate Bagnall who also joined us to speak on the importance of the study to raise awareness and funds.

The discussion then moved to inclusions with reference to Women Veterans Day. Women Veterans Day is observed on June 12 in the United States, a date chosen to mark the anniversary of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. The date is not recognized nationally, but is recognized by a few states, either through legislation or proclamation, and organizations. The stated goal of Women Veterans Day varies somewhat by state but can generally be acknowledged as an effort to honor the work of women in the United States Armed Forces and recognize the unique challenges that they have faced. The date was first recognized when the New York State Assembly declared June 12, 2008, to be Women Veterans' Recognition Day. Governor Larry Hogan proclaimed June 12 as Women Veterans Day in Maryland and announced the establishment of the Women Veterans Inclusion Program to support Women Veterans.

This year marks the 73rd anniversary of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, signed into law by President Harry S. Truman on June 12, 1948. This discussion led us to the Protecting Moms Who Served Act (S 423/HR 958) Protecting Moms Who Served Act of 2021," which codifies the Department of Veterans Affairs current maternity care coordination program. As we held this discussion Delegate Mike Rogers joined in the discussion to also add another bill concerning veteran tax on retired income (HB 012), forthcoming.

As we concluded, plans were made to work more closely with Delegate Mike Rogers, Delegate Heather Bagnall, Delegate Edith Patterson, Delegate C. T. Wilson, Senator Chris Van Hollen, to bring more veteran stakeholders to the roundtable; and to research and lobby related Bills that have established research data. We are looking into some other authorities and organizations to help make our voices more powerful such as the VA Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN 5), Advisor Committee Management Office (AMCO), Mental Illness Research and Education Clinical Centers.