IAVA Stands With Women Veterans, Calls for Passage of Deborah Sampson Act and a Change to the VA Motto

New York, NY (January 16, 2020) — In light of Secretary Willkie’s comments implying that VA transparency about assault allegations will cause veterans not to seek care at the VA, today IAVA calls upon the U.S. Senate to pass the Deborah Sampson Act (S. 514) and to revise the motto of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be more gender inclusive.

“For too long, women veterans have not felt heard or seen at the VA,” said IAVA CEO Jeremy Butler. “We need a strong showing of support for women veterans. Passing the Deborah Sampson Act and revising the VA motto to one that is inclusive of all veterans would be important signals to women veterans that they will be treated with respect.”

According to the VA in April 2019, a shocking one in four women reported being harassed at the VA. In September, a House staffer working on ending such harassment reported being attacked at a VA facility. Yesterday, Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Robert Wilkie wrote a letter to Chairman Takano of the House Armed Services Committee stating that her attack was “unsubstantiated.” The VA Inspector General quickly then responded via letter to Chairman Takano to clarify that the investigation was closed without charges, but that the attack had not been “unsubstantiated.”

“I commend the VA IG for correcting the record,” continued Butler. “The allegations made in this case are serious, and we support any veteran who is brave enough to come forward under these circumstances.”

The Deborah Sampson Act is a compendium bill that will bring the care that women receive at the Department of Veterans Affairs closer to the standards Americans have come to expect for male veterans. This bill has already passed the House, and now requires passage in the Senate.

The current VA motto currently reads: “To Care for Him Who Shall Have Borne the Battle, and His Wife and His Orphan.”