

[IAVA Takes Action to Change VA Motto with Formal Petition](#)

New York, NY (October 12, 2018) – Today, with representation from Yale Law School’s Veterans Legal Services Clinic, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN), and the New York City Veterans Alliance, delivered a “petition for rulemaking” requesting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) replace its current outdated and exclusionary motto with one that is inclusive of women. The current VA motto is “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.” This motto is gendered and fails to recognize the sacrifice and service of the over 2 million women veterans and their survivors, relegating them to the fringes of the veteran community. Many of the systemic issues confronting women veterans – inadequate healthcare facilities, mental illness, suicide – relate to a VA culture that does not adequately acknowledge their service and sacrifice.

“The time to act is now” said [Paul Rieckhoff](#), **Founder and CEO for IAVA**. “The unveiling of the [Women Serve monument](#) at Calverton National Cemetery is an important time to recognize and support women veterans. A long overdue motto change would do the same on the biggest level possible. By finally making this change, President Trump and VA leadership can mark a powerful commitment to creating a culture that acknowledges and respects the service and sacrifices of women veterans.”

IAVA, backed by dozens of leading allied veterans and military organizations, has repeatedly called on the Secretary and the VA to modernize its biased motto. IAVA met with both the [former](#) and [current](#) VA Secretaries and the [current Deputy Secretary](#), to discuss this needed change, published an [open letter asking the former Secretary](#) to take this meaningful step toward gender equality, and published multiple [essays](#) on the cascading impacts of the culture the motto represents. But after 18 months of [advocacy](#), the Administration has failed to take action, and President Trump continues to be silent on the issue.

“Years ago the Service Women’s Action Network first challenged the motto of the VA. Today, we are proud to join forces with IAVA and the NYC Veterans Alliance to continue to apply pressure on the VA and we will not stop until the motto is changed to reflect the realities of today’s veteran population.”– **Dr. Ellen Haring, SWAN CEO**

The delivery of the petition is another step in escalating IAVA’s groundbreaking [She Who Borne the Battle](#) campaign which is focused on transforming the landscape for women veterans in our country forever and includes advocating for passage of the bipartisan Deborah Sampson Act.

This petition asks the VA to create a new rule through "[notice and comment](#)" that officially updates the motto to be more inclusive. While not guaranteeing change, it does require that the Administration and the VA take an official position and let the country know where they stand when it comes to standing up for all veterans. A full copy of the petition can be found [here](#).

"Women veterans must feel fully welcome at all VA facilities, and that their military service is fully equal to their male counterparts," said [Kristen L. Rouse](#), Army veteran and Founding Director of the NYC Veterans Alliance which joined IAVA on the petition. "Too many women veterans seek VA healthcare only as a last resort – or not at all – because they've felt harassed, discriminated against, or that their military service was questioned at the VA – while signage on the wall clearly states that the VA is intended only for 'he who has borne the battle' instead of all veterans who have served and sacrificed for our nation. It is past time for the VA to ensure its central message is to care for all those who have borne the battle."

Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) added , "I fully support this petition to amend the VA's outdated motto to honor and recognize the 2 million women veterans who have served and sacrificed for our country. I have raised this issue personally with VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, as part of substantive and systemic reforms required to effectively serve women veterans. Updating this motto is about more than words – it is about signaling a commitment to meet the unique needs of our brave women veterans."

Over 345,000 women have deployed since 9/11. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline in the next decades, the population of women veterans will increase. Women continue to take on new roles and responsibilities throughout the services. Yet, their service and sacrifice is often overlooked, to their peril. For example, [new suicide numbers released last month by the Department of Veterans Affairs showed that in 2016, the suicide rate for women vets was 1.8 higher than for civilians.](#)

Though the quality of care and services provided by the VA for all veterans needs to improve, this is particularly critical for women veterans. [From 2003 through 2012, women's use of VA health care services increased 80 percent, with women veterans proportionately using mental health services more intensively than men](#) . Not only do women veterans encounter barriers to care and benefits, they do so in a culture that often does not accept them or fully recognize them as veterans. [They also face stunningly high rates of sexual assault](#).

IAVA's *She Who Borne the Battle* campaign is focused on righting this wrong and transforming the landscape for women veterans in our country forever. We need to take the American people to a place where women vets are envisioned just as readily as men. Congress must act to not only bring equality to VA healthcare for women, but also resource-sensible services like childcare. "Access to Quality Care for Our Veterans" should be gender blind, which in the case of supporting single parents, can impact men just as much as women.

CAMPAIGN GOALS INCLUDE:

1. Foster Culture and Leadership Change in the VA
2. Strengthen Data and Transparency Through Research
3. Support Women's Peer Programs
4. Increase Initiatives to Better Inform on Existing Programs
5. Require High Level of Community Care Cooperation

[The Service Women's Action Network](#) is the nation's leading not-for-profit organization advocating on behalf of all service women and women veterans. Our principal advocacy issues are: Ground Combat integration, Abolishing Military Sexual Trauma (MST), harassment and sexism in the military and at VA, Women's healthcare including reproductive healthcare provided by both VA and DoD through TRICARE.

[The NYC Veterans Alliance](#) achieves community wellness and access to services for all veterans in New York City and beyond, regardless of service era or discharge status. We empower veterans, families, and civilian allies to connect as a community, advocate for improved policies, and advance as civic leaders.

"Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America...remains the most important organization representing the new generation of veterans." – TIME Magazine

[Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America](#) (IAVA) is the premier veterans advocacy and support organization on the planet. Every day, we fight for veterans. Hard. We are the tip-of-the spear non-profit engine of impact that connects, unites and empowers over 400,000 veterans and allies nationwide. Founded by an Iraq veteran in 2004, IAVA is the non-partisan leader in [advocacy](#), [public awareness](#) and [1-on-1 case-management support](#). We [organize locally](#), and [drive historic impacts nationally](#). IAVA is vanguard of the veterans movement and the most powerful network of veterans on the planet. We have connected more than 1.2 million veterans with resources and community, and provided thousands of veterans of all generations with life-saving and life-changing [personalized support from IAVA's Master's-level social workers](#).

Learn more at www.iava.org.