



## **SHE WHO BORNE THE BATTLE: IAVA's Campaign to Fully Recognize and Improve Services for Women Veterans COSPONSOR the DEBORAH SAMPSON ACT**

### **IAVA Calls on You to Commit to Cosponsor the Deborah Sampson Act**

#### **Peer-to-Peer Assistance**

- Initiates a pilot program for peer-to-peer counseling for women veterans who are separating from the military. This program will provide information on VA services and benefits, employment mentorship, and outreach.
- Expands the capabilities of the women veterans call center to include text messaging
- Makes permanent the ability of women veterans to receive reintegration counseling services with their family members in group retreat settings.

#### **Legal and Support Services**

- Establishes a VA partnership with at least one community entity to provide legal services to women Veterans, focused on providing support for top unmet needs, such as: prevention of eviction or foreclosure, child support issues, restoring a drivers' license.
- Authorizes an increase of \$20 million to the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) fund, and allocate additional funds to organizations who support women vets.

#### **Newborn Care**

- Increases from seven to fourteen the number of days that VA can provide care to a newborn child of a woman veteran who is receiving maternity care by VA.
- Authorizes medically-necessary transport (e.g. ambulances) for these newborns to be paid by the medical services account, rather than through beneficiary travel.

#### **Eliminates Access Barriers Faced by Women Vets**

- Authorizes \$20 million to retrofit VA medical centers to provide for and enhance the privacy and environment for women veterans being treated (e.g. door locks, privacy curtains, etc.). Requires VA to submit a plan to address Department-wide deficiencies.
- Requires every VA facility to employ at least one women's health primary care provider.
- Expands the requirement for VA to staff the Women Veteran Program Manager program at each medical center with a WVPM and an Ombudsman.
- Authorizes an additional \$1 million annually for the Women Veterans Healthcare Mini-Residency Program, providing training for primary care and emergency care clinicians.

#### **Data Tracking and Reporting**

- Requires VA to collect/analyze data for all veterans programs by gender and minority status, and requires that they publish the data that does not undermine privacy.
- Requires VA to complete a report on the availability of prosthetics made for women veterans at VA, including variability across facilities
- Requires VA to centralize all information on their website for women veterans in one location
- Expresses a Sense of Congress that the motto of VA should be more inclusive

## **Background**

Nearly 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.

Though the quality of care and services provided by the VA for all veterans needs to dramatically improve, this is particularly critical for women veterans. The number of women seeking care at the Department of Veterans Affairs has increased by 80%. While the VA has created a firm foundation of care for women veterans, it is past time that the VA, with the support of Congress, brings that foundation to scale.

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. The time to act is now. Improving access to care and benefits while changing the underlying culture to one inclusive of women. This glaring problem is best exemplified in the gendered and very outdated motto that greets every person, male and female, who walk into the VA: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan."

## **About Deborah Sampson**

Deborah Sampson is a hero of the American Revolution. She disguised herself as a man and joined the Patriot forces. She served for over two years undetected, receiving an honorable discharge for her service. Four years after Sampson's death, her husband petitioned Congress for pay as the spouse of a soldier. In 1837, the committee concluded that the history of the Revolution "furnished no other similar example of female heroism, fidelity and courage." She was the only woman to earn a military pension for participation in the Revolutionary army. Her's is the story of the many women who serve with patriotism and valor, only to return home and have their service discounted or overlooked.