

Ranking Member Corrine Brown
Statement for the Record
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
"Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1575"
Thursday, April 23, 2015

Women Veterans Readjustment and Reintegration

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I would like to offer this testimony on behalf of H.R. 1575, legislation to honor the service and sacrifice of our heroic women veterans recently separated from military service after prolonged deployments. This bill extends and makes permanent a very successful pilot program at the Department of Veterans Affairs which provides psychiatric and psychological counseling and support in retreat settings for newly returned women veterans.

This legislation follows the release of a report by the Veterans Health Administration showing that this limited, 2-year pilot program, run by the Readjustment Counseling Service, has shown positive, measurable results helping returning women veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress, depression, sleep disturbances and isolation. Many of these servicewomen have been evaluated as service connected for severe PTSD.

In surveys, participants have consistently reported experiencing a marked decrease in stress symptoms and an increase in coping skills, including understanding better how to develop support systems and to access available resources at VA and in their communities following the program and as they reenter civilian life.

The Veterans Health Administration has completed six retreats in the two year pilot period. Post 9/11 women veterans, often combat veterans, are brought together in groups of about 20, in outdoor settings. Transportation is paid for. These one-week sessions were held in California, Colorado, New Mexico and Connecticut. The veterans, most of whom are coping with the effects of severe PTS, some as a result of sexual trauma while in the military, participated in trust building exercises and worked with counselors and psychological educators to build peer support. Other services offered on an as-needed basis are financial and occupational counseling and conflict resolution training.

H.R. 1575 provides VA with permanent authority to extend the program using the same measurements and eligibility requirements in the original law, P.L. 111-163. This expansion will mean an increase in the number of sessions and locations for the program. VA must submit a report to Congress every two years on the program.

This program is limited, well run and highly successful thereby providing us with a bit of good news and, more importantly, a chance to ensure a healthier, more successful transition back to civilian life for a specific group of heroic women warriors.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony on behalf of H.R. 1575, invite my colleagues' support, and look forward to its enactment as soon as possible.