



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
*Chairman Phil Roe, M.D.*

**HR 4635: To direct the secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of peer-to-peer counselors providing counseling for women veterans**

**Background:**

The Veterans Health Care Act of 1992 ([P.L. 102-585](#)) authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide gender-specific services for eligible women veterans. That authority has become increasingly important in recent years as the number of women veterans continues to rise. Today, there are more than 2 million women veterans in the United States, representing 9.2 percent of the total veteran population.

Research has shown that women exposed to stressful situations like combat or military sexual trauma react differently than their male counterparts, and female veterans commit suicide at nearly six times the rate of other women. For example, a 2014 report by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) found serious gaps in every aspect of the programs that serve women veterans, including health care, employment, finance, housing, social issues and the eradication of sexual assault. What's more, there are indications that women veterans may lack access to valuable peer support opportunities once they have separated from service, which can complicate the transition to VA from DOD and lead to increased mental and physical health problems.

H.R. 4635 would require VA to ensure that the department's volunteer peer counseling program includes a sufficient number of peer counselors for women veterans with expertise in gender-specific issues, VA services and benefits and employment mentoring. It would also require VA to emphasize peer-to-peer counseling for women veterans who suffered military sexual trauma, have PTSD or another mental health condition, or who are at-risk of becoming homeless.

**The Message:**

- As we strive to provide high-quality care to our nation's heroes, we must also care for the specific needs of female veterans.
- Female veterans currently lack access to valuable peer support opportunities once they have separated from service, which can complicate the transition from VA to DOD and lead to increased mental and physical health problems.
- This bill would expand access to peer counseling for female veterans.