

Good day committee members,

My name is Melissa Harcrow. I am an Army Veteran and an advocate for women Veterans. First, thank you for your role on this important committee. I personally appreciate the work and research you and past members have completed as I am sure what I am about to propose will not be news to you.

To support the Army's efforts to become more family friendly, recruit women, and retain quality Soldiers, I propose the committee recommend the U.S. Army authorize a parenthood-related separation code for officers.

Figure 4.2 of the DACOWITS 2017 Annual Report shows the gender distribution of parenthood related discharges from FY 2007-FY 2016. The note underneath states the Army data is only for enlisted Soldier as there is no parenthood-related separation code for officers. Authorizing such a code will assist the committee and the Army with capturing data about this type of discharge for officers and further track it by gender.

Currently, officers who are discharged for parenthood-related reasons receive separation code JHK which is attached to the narrative "Substandard Performance." As a former Army officer who received this discharge, this was a barrier to attaining a government job for nearly 10 years after my separation. In fact, when I tried to enter the Army Reserve, I

was denied, and questioned, because of this code. I appealed for a code change to the Army Review Boards Agency, a two year long wait, and was denied because another code does not exist for my situation. Additionally, the board chair felt it necessary to note in the decision letter that my parenthood-related discharge, the result of circumstances beyond my control, was a disgrace to the military.

As you are likely aware, women are the fastest growing subpopulation of Veterans as well as the fastest growing amongst homeless veterans as the data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development demonstrates. According to the Department of Labor, 3.7% of women veterans are unemployed compared to 2.7% of male veterans. I am not placing full responsibility of women veteran homelessness or unemployment on the "Substandard Performance" discharge code. Data does not exist to support that, but I believe we can agree that it may be a factor either directly or indirectly. Women are disproportionately affected by caregiving responsibilities compared to men which can further exacerbate the issues of women veteran homelessness and unemployment. Without employment, one cannot attain housing nor an excellent quality of life for themselves and their children.

I appreciate that Family Care Plans have been a subject of concern to the committee. We should further that concern to the Soldier's quality of life after their service. I am grateful to you for your attention to this matter and any future considerations you have.

Melissa Harcrow

Chair, City of El Paso Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee

Secretary, El Paso Texas Women Veterans