



STATE OF NEVADA
WOMEN VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Recommendations to the Governor and the Nevada Legislature prepared by the
Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC)**

1. Executive Summary

a. This report fulfills the requirement of Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 417.330 that the WVAC submit a report to the Governor, the Interagency Council on Veterans Affairs, and the Director of the Legislative Counsel by February 15 of each even-numbered year. The report:

- (1) Provides data on the demographics of Women Veterans within Nevada,
- (2) Discusses the contributions that Women Veterans have made on behalf of the United States and the state of Nevada,
- (3) Summarizes the activities of the Committee during the preceding two calendar years (January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2019), and
- (4) Makes recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Director of the Nevada Department of Veteran Services (NDVS) regarding issues relating to Women Veterans.

b. Attached to this report are the past two years' WVAC meeting agendas and minutes so recipients may make a more detailed review of the Committee's activities if they wish (see Enclosure A).

c. The WVAC considers the most important aspect of this report to be our 18 recommendations. These recommendations cover a wide range of topics, to include recommendations addressing the unique needs of Women Veterans, and how to improve support for programs for Women Veterans. Some of these recommendations require legislative action.

2. Demographics

During calendar year 2019, 2,609 military members indicated they were making Nevada their home following separation. Twenty percent or 553 of these were Women Veterans. 553 Women Veterans continued to or relocated to Nevada in 2018. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Sierra Nevada Health System in Reno reports 3,452 Women Veterans enrolled in their system. The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System in Las Vegas reports 7,967 Women Veterans enrolled. Additionally, some of Nevada's Women Veterans receive their health care from the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System. The VA Veterans Population chart, by state, estimated Nevada had a total of 22,042 Women Veterans on 30

September 2019. An estimated 39 percent of these Veterans reported as minority Veterans. These numbers indicate that there is still work to be done on identifying Women Veterans throughout the state of Nevada.

3. Contributions of Military Women and Women Veterans

a. Today over 210,000 women serve on active duty in the military services of the Department of Defense (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force), and another 5,955 serve in the Active Coast Guard—part of the Department of Homeland Security. According to the Defense Department, women now make up 20 percent of the Air Force, 19 percent of the Navy, 15 percent of the Army and almost 9 percent of the Marine Corps. National Guard components have dual state and federal roles. Like most of the active forces, the Reserve and Guard components have an increasing percentage of women in their ranks. As of February 2018, women constituted 158,090—or 19.8 percent—of all personnel serving in the six DoD Reserve and Guard forces. Women number 1,067—or 17.4 percent—of all personnel serving in the Coast Guard Reserve.

b. All military units and occupations are now open to women in the Active, Reserve and Guard Components. Beginning In 2016, women have the equal right to choose any military occupational specialty, including ground combat units, that were previously unauthorized. Pvt. 1st Class Brittany Sears and Spec. Cindy Robles reported to Fallon's 609th Engineer Co. in 2017, as the first two combat-trained soldiers assigned to any Nevada Army National Guard unit. And in January 2020, Nevada Army National Guard got its first ever female tanker. Second Lieutenant Katarina Schumacher become the first woman to successfully complete the required training to operate a tank and lead her own platoon.

c. In 2018, two women passed the Marine Corps Infantry Officer Training for the first time. On 4 January 2019 the U.S. Marine Corps announced that women recruits in the incoming 5 January, 2019 bootcamp class will form one of five platoons in the formerly all-male 3rd battalion at Parris Island. The USMC remains the only service that segregates men and women at bootcamp

d. Women now make up approximately 10 percent of the current Veteran population, the fastest-growing demographic. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) continues to strive to improve health care for Women Veterans. VA's Women's Health Services (WHS) provides unique clinical training opportunities to equip VA providers and nurses to better support Women Veterans' long-term health and well-being. This Women's Health Mini-Residency training is one offering that bolsters the expertise of VA's primary care and emergency care providers and nurses to address the full range of Women Veterans' medical needs.

4. 2018-2019 WVAC Activities

a. The Women Veterans Advisory Committee continues to work on behalf of Nevada's Women Veterans. We are grateful for your support of the Women's Military History Week Proclamation for March 17-23, 2019. At Veterans and Military Day at the Legislature (VAMDAL) on March 20, 2019, the proclamation was read and all Women Veterans in attendance were called forward for a photograph. It was wonderful to see so many Women Veterans in attendance and they were thankful for your support.



Additionally, the WVAC hosted a convening that same day with key stakeholders about how we can better celebrate the legacy of Women Veterans. We were honored to have Senator Cortez Masto join us during that session.



b. Members of the WVAC were active participants during the 80th legislative session. We supported the bill to upgrade the Women Veterans Coordinator position at NDVS to include Veterans Services Officer duties. This upgrade results in a higher grade for the position and the commensurate salary with that grade. Over the past several years, there has been high turnover in the Women Veteran Coordinator position resulting in disrupted service and lack of continuity in programs and services for Women Veterans. We expect a higher salary for this position will lead to more longevity for the person serving in this position. Additionally, a VSO who gains expertise in handling Military Sexual Trauma cases will be a valuable asset for NDVS.

c. As part of our mission to identify Women Veterans, the WVAC initiated a pin project to better identify Women Veterans. Committee members, as well as senior staff at NDVS, have the pins available to present to Women Veterans as we encounter them. Additionally, pins will be included in letters being sent to recently transitioning Women Veterans as we ask for their assistance in identifying their needs as Women Veterans. Our hope is that these pins will encourage more women to talk about their military service.



d. The WVAC sent a letter of support to Senator Cortez Masto supporting the Servicewomen's Health Transition Training Act of 2019 that she introduced. This legislation, if passed, will help Women Veterans better understand the services that are available to them by educating them on the services provided by the Veterans Health Administration prior to leaving active duty service.

e. In addition to our duties on the WVAC, all members are active in Veteran community organizations to include Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Adopt a Vet Dental, Lady Vets of Reno, Military Officers Association of America, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, Southern Nevada Veterans Community Engagement Board, Truckee Meadows Veteran Community Coalition, United Veterans Legislative Council, Navy League, Association of the United States Army, American Legion, Women Veterans of Nevada, Air Force Association, Women Veterans Alliance and Daughters of the American Revolution. The Women Veterans of Nevada hosted their 2nd annual High Tea in March 2019 with over 100 Women Veterans in attendance. One

WVAC member assisted the Elko Veteran Corps with their first Elko Veteran's Ball in November 2019. Members have participated in NDVS Veterans in Care events and Missing in Nevada burials in Southern Nevada. WVAC members represent Women Veterans on the Women Veterans Health Committee and the Veteran and Family Advisory Committee at the Sierra Nevada Health Care System in Reno and the Veteran and Family Advisory Council for the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System. Committee members have also spoken about Women Veterans at numerous events to include GI Forum, Bureau of Land Management Women's Equality Day, Soroptimist International Sierra Nevada Region, and Nevada Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. WVAC members have participated in numerous roundtable discussion on Veterans issues to include those for Senator Rosen and Representative Horsford.



5. WVAC Recommendations

a. The recommendations below were discussed and approved by the WVAC.

b. There are a total of 18 recommendations. While some pertain to Women Veterans specifically, others pertain to the entire Veteran community.

Recommendation 1: Make the recognition of Women's Military History a permanent annual recognition. Thank you for signing the proclamation for Women's Military History Week in Nevada from March 17-23, 2019. This was a great recognition of Nevada's Women Veterans during Veterans and Military Day at the Legislature (VAMDAL). We would like you to sign another proclamation declaring March 2020 as Women's Military History Month as part of Women's History Month. In the next legislation session, we will pursue making this a recurring event each year.

Recommendation 2: Fill the vacant seat on the WVAC. In accordance with NRS 417.320 the Women Veterans Advisory Committee is comprised on five members. One of our members resigned from the WVAC effective May 15, 2019 since she moved out of Nevada. Although several Women Veterans have expressed interest in joining the committee and submitted their applications, a new member has not been appointed. In order to better serve Nevada's Women Veterans, we ask that you appoint a new member to the committee as soon as possible.

Recommendation 3: Fund travel for the WVAC members for one in-person committee meeting and for one member to attend a national conference. To better serve Nevada's Women Veterans. Having the Women Veterans Advisory Committee meet in person a minimum of one time per year is helpful since we are better able to get to know one another and form a cohesive team in support of Nevada's Women Veterans. Additionally, recommend one member of the WVAC be authorized to attend one national conference on Women Veterans issues per year. Recommend NRS 417.320 be revised to reimburse WVAC members for this travel to include a subsistence allowance of not more than \$56 per day, as fixed by the Director, Nevada Department of Veteran Services and actual expenses for transportation, while traveling on business of the Women Veterans Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 4: Continue Military Sexual Trauma training. The Nevada Department of Veteran Services (NDVS) has been conducting Military Sexual Trauma (MST) training over the past several years both in the Reno and Las Vegas areas. Particularly valuable has been their partnership with the Perry Foundation to conduct MST training with health professionals within the Veterans Health Administration as well as health professionals in the local communities. These training sessions have been well received and well attended due to the ability to offer Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to the participants. The WVAC recommends NDVS continue the training sessions for health professionals but also look for ways to provide training to survivors of MST as well as their

supporters. Recommend NDVS conduct different types of events for survivors and supporters to include such topics such as empowerment, growth, and resiliency. NDVS should consider more hands-on options like obstacle courses for confidence building.

Recommendation 5: Support and promote Veteran-owned businesses. WVAC recommends support of Veteran-owned businesses by requiring the Secretary of State to waive the annual fee for a state business license for newly created Veteran-owned businesses. Existing law imposes an annual fee of \$500 for certain corporations and \$200 for other businesses for a state business license. Require the Secretary of State to waive the annual fee for a state business license during the first 4 years of the existence of a business that is at least 51 percent Veteran-owned. The Secretary of State reviewed a bill in the 80th legislative session and determined that such a bill could potentially incentivize Veteran-owned business licensing which may provide revenue generation. While such a change to the law would benefit all Veterans starting new businesses, it may be particularly valuable for Women Veterans. Four of every 10 U.S. businesses are owned by women, with female-led businesses having grown a spectacular 58 percent from 2007 to 2018. Businesses owned by women generate \$3.1 trillion in revenue. Nevada ranks ninth in growth of women-owned firms since 2007 and, among metropolitan areas, Las Vegas comes in fifth, according to the State of Women-Owned Businesses Report which was commissioned by American Express. Today, women-owned businesses account for 40 percent of all firms in the United States, according to the report. That's up from just 4.6 percent in 1972. The report also found that minority women are leading the pack in terms of launching their own businesses. The number of women minority-owned businesses has grown 163 percent — triple the rate of the female demographic as a whole — since 2007. Additionally, require the Secretary of State to report statistics on Veteran-owned businesses and look for opportunities to promote Veteran-owned businesses.

Recommendation 6: Support efforts to register Nevada's Women Veterans at the Women In Military Service for America (WIMSA) Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. The WIMSA Memorial is the only major national memorial honoring all women who have defended America throughout history. We should recognize their devoted patriotism and bravery as an integral part of our national heritage. It is free for women to register and WVAC will make every effort to ensure Nevada's Women Veterans are recognized at this national memorial.

Recommendation 7: Support NDVS Transition Assistance Program initiative. Servicemembers leaving military service should understand their Veterans benefits prior to leaving military service. While NDVS has attempted to partner with Nellis Air Force Base to present information during their Transition Assistance

Program (TAP), they have been largely unsuccessful. In light of this, NDVS wants to start its own Transition Assistance Program aimed at National Guard members prior to their departure from military service. Providing our servicemembers information on their benefits helps establish a relationship prior to their separation.

Recommendation 8: Continue to support Veteran Information System (VIS). NDVS has attempted to establish a database to identify all Veterans in Nevada but has encountered multiple issues. Such a database would enable NDVS to determine a baseline number of Veterans in Nevada. The WVAC believes establishing a baseline of Women Veterans is important to determine if we are identifying Women Veterans in the state. Without knowing who our Veterans are and how to reach them, we cannot ensure they are receiving the benefits and opportunities they have earned as a result of their service. Additionally, without a baseline number, it is impossible to determine if the outreach efforts of NDVS as well as other Veteran Services Organizations are effective. The WVAC recommends NDVS continue their implementation plans for its VIS database, continue looking for partners to increase the data available to better identify Veterans, and continue to seek budgetary or grant funding to fund the continued administration of the VIS. Once a baseline number of Women Veterans is established, the WVAC recommends NDVS work to increase that number by a minimum of 5% per year until at least 80% of the total estimated number of Women Veterans is reached. This will enable the WVAC to determine the effectiveness of outreach methods and make recommendations for further outreach methods.

Recommendation 9: Continue funding the 2-1-1 Nevada line. The mission of 2-1-1 Nevada is to empower all Nevadans to achieve optimal self-sufficiency, health and well-being. 2-1-1 Nevada connects all individuals, families, and providers to essential health and human services information and resources. Administration and oversight of Nevada 2-1-1 is the responsibility of the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) under Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 232.359. The 2-1-1 line supports Veterans throughout Nevada, connecting them to Veterans' benefits as well as other community services. WVAC recommends NDVS develop a database of Veteran resources to share with 2-1-1 Nevada. Further, WVAC recommends DHHS receive training to increase knowledge of Veteran programs and services.

Recommendation 10: Continue to support incarcerated Veterans initiatives to include the Veterans Unit of the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) Re-entry Department. The mission of the NDOC Re-Entry is to enhance public safety by providing offenders effective program services to prepare them for established re-entry into the community. This program has demonstrated success and should continue.

Recommendation 11: Continue support to Missing in Nevada missions at both the Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery and the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery. The Nevada Veterans Coalition is supporting the "Missing in America" mission to ensure Veterans receive the honor and burial they earned through their military service. In 2011 and 2013 there was legislation enacted which mandated funeral homes report unclaimed Veterans to NDVS. Unfortunately, many funeral homes were not made aware of the requirement. Since early 2015, the Funeral and Cemetery Services Board has been educating funeral homes and encouraging funeral homes to review the cremated remains in their possession and explain the requirements to them. The Funeral and Cemetery Board has added questions to their inspection process to get a better idea on the efforts funeral homes have made to locate unclaimed Veterans' remains. Some funeral homes, however, have stored remains for over 60 years so it is a daunting task to review those remains. All efforts must be made to ensure all Veterans receive a proper burial.

Recommendation 12: Expand outreach to rural Veterans. NDVS should continue to expand video outreach to rural Veterans. Due to the difficulty in reaching out to Veterans in rural areas, NDVS should take advantage of technology to reach out to these Veterans. NDVS has successfully used video outreach to discuss benefits. The new Women Veteran Service Officer must be able to reach out to Women Veterans throughout the state. Ensure NDVS is equipped to perform videoconferencing to reach Veterans throughout the state.

Recommendation 13: Make NDVS Northern Nevada Outreach Director a full-time position. While the majority of Veterans in Northern Nevada live in the Reno-Sparks-Carson City area, there are many who do not. It is important to reach Veterans throughout the state and make them aware of the benefits they have earned. One of the most effective ways to reach out is through outreach events. Many Nevada Veteran Advocates have been trained and could be better utilized through a coordinated outreach program that reaches all Northern Nevada. A full-time Northern Nevada Outreach Director would assist in that process.

Recommendation 14: Support the creation of a rural Burial Ground in Elko. In 2013, the Veterans Administration announced plans to construct a rural burial ground in Elko. Several hurdles remain in bringing this much needed cemetery for our Veterans to Elko, and the WVAC recommends that the State of Nevada remain committed to assisting our Federal Partners complete this project.

Recommendation 15: Create and support Military Spouse Employment and Reciprocity Programs. Military spouse unemployment and underemployment continue to persist despite legislative and community efforts. With military

families moving an average of once every three years, military spouses in licensed occupations must undertake the costly and time-consuming process of obtaining a new license every time they move across state lines. The WVAC recommends the expansion of Military Spouse Employment and Reciprocity Programs.

Recommendation 16: Consider offering a week-end burial option at Nevada State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries. Currently, interments at the Southern and Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemeteries are only offered on weekdays. Many local families and family traveling from other locations are unable to take time off during the week for burial services. Offering a weekend option would help support families wishing to inter their loved ones at the state cemeteries.

Recommendation 17: Create Scatter Gardens at both the Northern and Southern State Veterans Cemeteries. Not every veteran wishes to be interred; many choose to be scattered. The WVAC recommends the creation of a peaceful and respectful place to scatter the ashes of our Veterans within the two state Veteran cemeteries.

Recommendation 18: Eliminate cost for spousal burial in Nevada State Veteran Cemeteries. While the VA does not reimburse states for interring spouses of veterans, spouses are buried at no charge at Federal Veterans' cemeteries and at some state Veterans' cemeteries. The VSC recommends that the spouses of our veterans, whose contributions are incalculable, are interred at no cost.

6. Conclusion

This report and its recommendations align with the WVAC's duty to advise the Governor, Nevada Legislature, and the NDVS Director. The WVAC believes that through reports such as this, it can continue to make important contributions to improving service to Nevada's Women Veterans and their families. It is in the pursuit of this goal that the WVAC submits this report for consideration ahead of the next Legislative Session.



Anne L. Davis
Chair, Women Veterans Advisory Committee

14 FEB 2020

Date

