

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

General Robert B. Neller
Commandant of the Marine Corps
Headquarters, US Marine Corps
3000 Marine Corps, Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-3000

Dear Secretary Shulkin and General Neller:

We write today regarding the recent reports of sexual harassment of female service members and veterans through online Facebook groups and other websites. We are deeply troubled by these new revelations and want to draw urgent attention to the fact that current and former service members who have been targeted by this despicable sexual harassment must be made fully aware of the eligibility criteria for services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Vet Centers to both veterans and active duty service members. We urge you to take swift and thorough action to contact and educate anyone potentially impacted on the full extent of the resources available through both the Department of Defense (DOD) and VA.

As you know, a veteran or current service member who has experienced a military sexual trauma (MST) may be eligible to receive services at a Vet Center. According to VA, the definition of "MST" derives from Title 38 U.S. Code 1720D as, "psychological trauma, which in the judgment of a VA mental health professional, resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the veteran was serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training." Given the type of online harassment seen at Marines United and other webpages, we believe these incidents would clearly qualify a veteran or service member to receive services at a Vet Center. To that end, we strongly urge VA leadership to take a position of maximum flexibility in granting Vet Center eligibility for those impacted by this appalling situation. If additional authorities are required to provide services to targeted or potentially targeted veterans or service members who were impacted by this cyber harassment, please provide further explanation immediately.


We entrust military leaders to follow through on their commitment to ensure survivors of MST are provided the fullest range of support possible, including but not limited to chaplaincy services, victim legal programs, equal opportunity advisers, and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response counselors. We believe that adding Vet Centers to this list is critical because the employees at these facilities are highly trained to work with military sexual trauma survivors and utilize decades of experience in working with veterans and service members. The counseling services provided at these facilities play an ongoing and vital role in the healing process for thousands of veterans and families across the country, and they often specifically benefit active duty service members because they are not located on military bases and the services can be provided in a confidential setting.

We appreciate your efforts to serve our service members and veterans, and look forward to your prompt response.

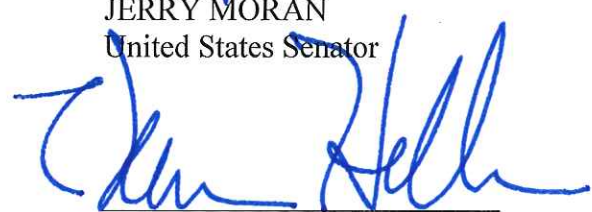
Sincerely,



ION TESTER
United States Senator



JERRY MORAN
United States Senator



DEAN HELLER
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



SHERROD BROWN
United States Senator



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator



MAZIE KHIRONO
United States Senator



KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND
United States Senator



MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator



TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator



EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator



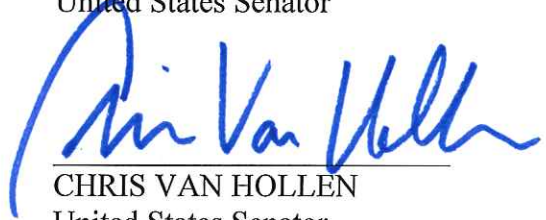
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United States Senator



CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator



AL FRANKEN
United States Senator



TOM UDALL
United States Senator



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator

cc: Secretary of Defense James Mattis