

# Keating introduces bill to improve women veterans' healthcare

Today, Congressman Bill Keating introduced the Women Veterans Access to Quality Care Act of 2018, which shines a spotlight on the gaps in adequate health care faced by women veterans and directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to address it. Congressman Keating's district has the largest number of veterans in the Commonwealth. The lead cosponsors of this bipartisan legislation are Representatives Elise Stefanik (R-NY), Mike Coffman (R-CO), and Jackie Speier (D-CA).

Specifically, the bill would require:

- all VA facilities to have at least one full-time obstetrician-gynecologist;
- inspection of all VA facilities to ensure they are following women's health guidelines to preserve patients' privacy, safety, and dignity;
- the VA to conduct a pilot residency program to increase medical positions for obstetrician-gynecologists;
- the Secretary of the VA to develop procedures to share veterans' information with state veterans agencies to ensure continuity of care at local facilities and improve processing times.

The legislation also ties the performance of directors of VA medical centers to health outcomes for women veterans and requires disclosure of data on women's health outcomes at each VA medical facility. This means that if women are unable to receive certain treatments or procedures are delayed, there will be information available to ensure there is accountability and improvements going forward.

"Women are the fastest growing group of veterans and too many

of our VA facilities are not equipped to deal with their medical needs,” said Congressman Keating. “VA facilities must be required to have doctors trained to meet the needs of their female veteran patients, treat gender-specific mental health needs, and offer prosthetic options suitable for women. This is critical because female veterans typically have lower household incomes that often puts affordable healthcare out of reach. Female veterans are also twice as likely to be homeless compared to male veterans, are more likely to be single parents, and are twice as likely to develop PTSD after serving in combat. Our women in uniform risk their lives for this country and have done so by overcoming substantial barriers to service with courage and conviction. It is our responsibility to honor their service by ensuring their healthcare needs are met when their service has ended.”

“As more and more women serve in the Armed Forces, we must adapt our VA services to ensure they are receiving the care they need and deserve,” said Congresswoman Stefanik. “This bill takes commonsense steps so that our women veterans receive better health outcomes, and I am proud to support this initiative to ensure the VA is providing care for all of our nation’s heroes.”

“As the demographics of our nation’s military continue to change, the VA must also adapt to meet the specific needs of the expanding female veteran population,” said Congressman Coffman. “Our country has an obligation to ensure our women veterans are provided the same healthcare benefits they earned in service to our nation, just like their male counterparts.”

“Women have long served in our armed forces, and as more and more enter combat duty we need to ensure that the federal government is doing everything it can to ensure their health needs are met just like their brothers in arms. Passage of this bill would be a big step in the right direction,” said Congresswoman Speier.

This legislation is the House companion to a Senate bill introduced by Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Patty Murray (D-WA).