

APPENDIX

Good morning, I am Barbara Kim-Hagemann – a US Army Gulf War Veteran – and a Past State Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Thank you Chairwoman Tucker and committee members for allowing me to be here today.

I served during a time when military sexual harassment policies were either non-existent or ignored, rapes were hidden under the carpet, and women veterans found the Veterans Administration wholly unprepared or unwilling to address women's medical conditions.

Times have changed and as a long - time veterans' advocate, I've had a front row seat in seeing the vision of the women who served before me, the pioneers of WW II, Korea and Vietnam, who paved the way for women in military service today, become reality.

I have two personal stories that touch people right here in this room. The first is a rape of a female Marine which occurred on Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. She was so convinced that the authorities on base would not investigate her complaint, she drove to NJ to report the crime to a local NJ police detective, also a Marine whom her family trusted. This detective along with investigators from Earle Naval Station here in NJ were able to successfully prosecute the fellow Marine who beat and raped her. That detective is in this room today.

The second tragic incident involves the cousin of one of our incoming Post Commanders who is here with us today. Selena Roth, a recently medically discharged veteran murdered on base, the Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, by her estranged husband. Her prior experiences inspired her to fought for the rights of female active-duty members against domestic violence and military sexual trauma (MST) in the military. The military failed to protect her while on active duty and failed to protect her as a veteran on a military base.

The creation of a sexual assault prevention and response program along with the appointment^{of} a sexual assault response coordinator is long overdue. It is important that the program and coordinator shall exercise the authority granted under this section independently from the chain of command within the department. This ensures command influence does not hinder the investigation or the protection of the victim.

I respectfully request that this bill move out of this committee with a unanimous yes vote

Good morning, Chairwoman Tucker, Vice Chairman DeAngelo, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Lucy Del Gaudio. I am a United States Army Veteran, a prominent advocate in the military and veteran community, and part of a coalition made up of thousands of women and gender-diverse veterans that are seeking equitable justice and systemic change. I served honorably, from 1990 through 1998, in both active-duty and Reserve components and I continue to serve my siblings in arms through my advocacy work. Primarily through my roles in Minority Veterans of America and Co-Chair of the NJ SOS Veterans Stakeholders women's subcommittee, I espouse survivors of military sex crimes, to predominately include those who experienced sexual harassment, discrimination, and assault during military service or while accessing due and necessary services within state and federal VA systems. Thank you for inviting me to contribute to the important and necessary work that you are doing to address this sexual violence epidemic.

I was born and raised in Union City, New Jersey, to Cuban/Puerto Rican parents. After my father passed away in 1989, my mother could not afford to send both of her daughters to college. Acutely aware of the strife my mother pushed through, and in an effort to lessen that burden on her, I followed in my brother's footsteps and enlisted in the Army. My intentions in joining were not just to attain an education through MOS training and the GI Bill, I wanted to be a career Soldier. For a bulk of the minority veteran community, military service is the only way to break historic and systemic cycles of poverty. I am just one of many within my community that followed this similar path. I am here today as their representative, with the knowledge that many of them have never, and will never have, an opportunity to hold the space that I have today.

As is true with many young enlistees, the rose-colored glasses that I metaphorically wore to basic training were quickly knocked off. Racial slurs and sexual innuendos were tossed throughout the berthing and workspace as if they were fundamental training tools, and everyone around me seemed to be okay with it. When I shared my discomfort

I was either met with retaliatory, remedial training or told that my experiences were "just part of the military culture," a cost of entry to join an elite and exclusive fraternity.

I first became a survivor of sexual violence at the hands of a higher-ranking non-commissioned officer within my chain of command, after reporting to my first overseas duty station. After gathering the necessary courage, I pursued the only available remedy: reporting my assault to my chain of command. Nothing was done to hold my abuser and my attacker accountable. In fact, the responses I received centered on my attacker's career and personal livelihood, with not even a glance towards how this experience has, and continues to, impact me and my life. When looking to pursue alternative measures for recourse, I was gaslit and reminded that nobody would ever believe a Soldier like me.

I was a highly motivated Soldier, and I was good at my job. However, this experience, understandably, subdued any desire I had to make a career out of my selfless service. I found that my disposition, both in and out of uniform, was no longer highlighting and prioritizing my identity as a Soldier and my place as a member of the nation's security defense team, but instead my constitution had reverted to self-protection while navigating a broken system intrinsically designed to silence me at best, and at most criminalize my identity and experiences. The Army is a system that I voluntarily joined, believing that I was safe and welcome, but became one that I could not safely and honorably escape.

I did not publicly identify as a veteran for 17 years following my discharge. I refused to access the benefits and services that I earned and deserved because I did not feel safe or welcome in the spaces that I would need to navigate in order to access them. I knew that the same people that abused me and others like me pervade these spaces and continue to commit the same despicable acts and make the same repulsive comments as they did when we wore the uniform together.

I speak up now, finally reclaiming my service and my identity, because I have siblings in arms that are experiencing the same violence that I experienced and are navigating the same broken systems that I did nearly 20 years ago. This is shameful.

We must recognize that radical change requires the acknowledgment that we are working with broken systems, and that those systems need to be equitably reformed and restructured or entirely replaced by systems that are intentionally designed with our nation's most marginalized in mind. The abusers and the attackers benefit from the current systems and processes that our country and our state employ: the systems that are supposed to be designed to protect people like me. These abusers retain control and dominance while our nation's survivors, some of the most marginalized and underserved within our military and veteran populations, feel unheard, unwelcome, and most insidiously, unsafe.

I want to applaud Chairwoman Tucker's and Assemblywomen Gove's, Chaparro's, and Dunn's introduction of A5784 earlier this month. The creation of a sexual assault prevention and response program with a designated coordinator within the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is the first step towards equitable justice and rebuilding the lost trust and confidence of our veteran-survivors. Removing the only available reporting mechanism from the survivor's chain of command and allowing for informed confidentiality will help to ensure future survivors are heard, are not gaslit, and are free to advocate for themselves without fear of retaliation. This Bill creates a voice for the thousands of people like me, and will serve to ensure accountability is maintained alongside a stronger and more comprehensive training and prevention developed program.

Supporting and protecting our in-state military and veteran-survivors should be a bi-partisan concern. The state of New Jersey has always been a model for neighboring states as to how to effectively advocate for our in-state military and veteran community. We remain in the forefront and are taking enormous steps in the right direction.

I am privileged and honored to present the first ever Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of NJ Distinguished Legislator Award.

Assemblywoman Cleopatra G. Tucker is a graduate of Miles College & Tennessee State University

She was elected to the NJ State Assembly in 2008 and is the Chair of the Military & Veterans Affairs Committee and a member of both the Appropriations and Human Services Committees.

NJ is the only state which classifies veteran service into separate categories there by denying some veterans of state benefits. For decades, the VFW and other veteran service organizations fought for a vet is a vet legislation. There were many hurtles and roadblocks – mostly “it is too expensive’ or “it will never happen because we have to change the State Constitution”. As the fight dragged on in Trenton many quit and moved on. In the end there was only two left standing to fight – the VFW – and Assemblywoman Tucker. Last year – together we changed the State Constitution and improved the lives of tens of thousands of veterans.

When it comes to veteran and troop suicide or family grievement counseling – it is Assemblywoman Tucker who pushed VFW sponsored legislation that will save lives and improve mental health.

When our comrades, their spouses and Gold Star parents were dying in unprecedented numbers in our Veteran Memorial Homes – it was Assemblywoman Tucker who was the first to call us wanting to correct the situation. Subsequent investigations revealed the state denied our comrades – and I quote from the from the US Dept of Health report – a dignified existence.

We've worked together since then – sometimes against great odds and opposition – and last week her Committee moved legislation which will bring transparency, vastly improved management and oversight to the homes. Her hard work on this legislation will improve the wellbeing of our comrades in those homes - and more importantly ensure them a dignified existence.

Her dedication to New Jerseys veterans is second to none, is deserving of our recognition and praise – and on behalf of our Commander and members – I present this first ever Distinguished Legislator Award to our friend Cleopatra Tucker.