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Subject: Submitted testimony for HB2489 on Mar 28, 2016 09:00AM
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HB2489

Submitted on: 3/28/2016

Testimony for WAM on Mar 28, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Rachel James	Individual	Support	No

Comments: COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS Senator Jill Tokuda, Chair Donovan Dela Cruz, Vice Chair DATE: Monday, March 28, 2016 TIME: 9:00 a.m. PLACE: Conference Room 211 STRONG SUPPORT FOR HB2489, that establishes and funds a veterans coordinator (counselor IV) position within the Office of Veterans' Services, to assist all veterans, with a primary focus on female veterans who served on active duty for the full period they were activated. Aloha Chair Tokudaa and committee members, I am Rachel James, Secretary of The Hawaii Women Veterans Sub-Committee. We are in strong support of this measure. The Task Force that grew into today's Sub-Committed was formed by the Legislature in 2012 to address the needs women veterans in Hawaii. We submitted a report to the 2013 Legislature that detailed preliminary findings concerning our women warriors. We found that military sexual trauma (MST) is rampant in the armed services, that homelessness and joblessness along with PTSD, are some of the major problems that our women face. The 2013 report included a recommendation to create a Women's Services Coordinator position. Last year HB2072 was introduced to create and fund this position as a "veterans service coordinator" focusing on women. Sadly the bill died in conference as the legislative clock ran out. We feel there is some urgency to create this position, based on our research. In order to assess the scope and type of needs, we did an informal survey of women veterans throughout the state. We found that women don't know what benefits they have, that they need services for PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma, that they need re-entry services and employment services, and that they would like help getting educational benefits. Some of them had questions about eligibility. Some complained of lack of access to OB/GYN and breastfeeding among others services, many of which are provided but the veterans were unaware. Our results match those of two more extensive surveys by Disabled American Veterans and CalVet. All of the surveys demonstrated a need for continuous education about benefits and constant outreach. The coordinator/counselor will provide a focus with which to address the specific needs of women veterans, bridging gaps in care. It will aid with the process of helping the approximately 12,000 women veterans in Hawaii to move forward in their lives. It will help the OVS to collect data, integrate services, educate women veterans on their benefits, assist women veterans in getting access to appropriate health care, assist the task force in outreach efforts and a host of other duties. Of particular import and

impact is, the counselor will help the Office of Veterans Services to assess what services are successful and necessary. Hawaii boasts leading numerics in different areas of concern. First in the nation to set a 100% RPS for the entire state. However, we also lead the nation in per capita homeless individuals. We have a tremendous opportunity to showcase how the State of Hawaii rises to meet challenges and sets standards that exemplify our state's commitment to the people of Hawaii and the place herself. Hawaii's military women have served our nation often at great cost to their health, their lives and too often to their human dignity. As a state we need to recognize their sacrifice by addressing their needs. This position is the first step in doing that and will set yet another pono standard for others to emulate. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify Rachel James Secretary, Hawaii Women Veterans Sub-Committee

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