

ACT 209

H.B. NO. 2489

A Bill for an Act Relating to the Department of Defense.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. Women have served honorably and courageously in all of America's wars and conflicts since the American Revolution. With nearly fifteen per cent of the United States Armed Forces consisting of women, the population of female veterans is increasing exponentially and is projected to exceed ten per cent of the total veteran population by the year 2020. More than thirteen thousand female veterans reside in Hawaii alone.

The circumstances and challenges faced by female veterans, as well as women on active duty, are often different from those of their male counterparts. Despite this, veterans' benefits have traditionally been designed to address the needs of male veterans.

In recognition of a growing need to improve veterans' services to address the specific needs of female veterans in such areas as medical and mental health care, child care services, housing, and financial assistance, Senate Resolution No. 6, S.D. 1 (2012) urged the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the Hawaii office of veterans' services to develop comprehensive programs and services to address the needs of female veterans and women on active duty. In response to Senate Resolution No. 6, S.D. 1, the Hawaii office of veterans' services established the Hawaii women military veterans task force with the mission "to improve the lives of women veterans who are serving or who have served in the military, to identify and address the unique needs of women veterans, and to harness the power of women to influence change."

In 2013, after numerous meetings, the task force submitted a report to the legislature that concluded that military women face multiple interrelated complex problems, including a high rate of military sexual trauma, and for female veterans, the related reentry issues of adequate health care, high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, homelessness, and joblessness.

Furthermore, with the recent Department of Defense announcement to allow women in all front-line combat jobs, including infantry, artillery, armor, and special operations units, even more program emphasis will be needed when these military women eventually leave the service and become veterans.

The legislature finds that one way to help address the various problems and needs of veterans is to establish and fully fund a veterans services 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.

The purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds for:

- (1) The establishment of one full-time permanent veterans services counselor IV position in the office of veterans' services; and
- (2) The Vietnam veterans fiftieth anniversary commemoration.

SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$50,772 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2016-2017 for the establishment of one full-time equivalent (1.00 FTE) permanent veterans services counselor IV position in the office of veterans' services to address the various problems and needs of all veterans, with a primary focus on female veterans, who served on active duty for the full period they were activated.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of defense for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2016-2017 for the Vietnam veterans fiftieth anniversary commemoration.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of defense for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2016.

(Approved July 5, 2016.)