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June 3, 2026

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

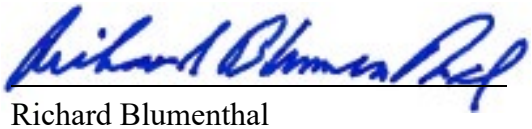
I write today to urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to amend the evidentiary standard required to confirm the incident in service for all disability compensation claims related to military sexual trauma (MST). Veterans who submit a claim for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can submit non-military evidence to corroborate the occurrence of an MST, yet those submitting a claim for any other diagnosis cannot. VA's policy must be changed to ensure veterans who experience anxiety, depression, or other mental or physical health conditions related to MST do not face an uphill battle when proving they were sexually assaulted.

In 2002, VA amended its regulations (67 FR 10330) to allow veterans with PTSD related to an in-service personal assault to submit evidence from sources other than their service records to corroborate their account of the stressor incident. As a result, MST survivors with PTSD who did not feel comfortable reporting an incident through official military channels during their service are now able to submit a broad array of evidence – such as civilian police reports, statements from family members, records from civilian health facilities, and more – in pursuit of a disability compensation claim. Though this change marked substantial progress, veterans applying for any non-PTSD claim related to MST are still only able to submit service records as corroborating evidence of the occurrence of an MST event. They are made to feel as if VA does not believe their story because they did not report an MST during service and, consequently, are often retraumatized by the claims process.

This double standard is a failure for MST survivors with non-PTSD diagnoses, requiring them to reach an often-unattainable burden of proof when they have already endured unimaginable pain. Given how many instances of MST go unreported during service, I urge you to amend VA's regulations to ensure all MST survivors – no matter the mental or physical health condition they incurred as a result – are afforded the same broad evidentiary standards as those allowed for MST-related PTSD claims. This is an issue nearly all major Veterans Service Organizations have endorsed for several years, because of the barriers they see their members face during the claims process for MST-related conditions, and which the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommend in their recent report on improving the MST claims process.

I encourage you to take swift action to enact these changes, to ensure all MST survivors experience a more just claims process.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs