

CONGRESSWOMAN  
CHELLIE PINGREE

1ST DISTRICT  
MAINE



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SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOW AND  
EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 24, 2012

The Honorable Allison Hickey  
Under Secretary for Benefits  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear General Hickey,

Thank you for your leadership to address serious issues of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). I appreciate the recent announcement made by Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to offer certain victims of MST the opportunity for their disability claims to be reviewed. The department's willingness to take another look at denials that in some cases should have been decided in a veteran's favor is a significant step.

In recent conversations I have had with VA leadership and VA's recent testimony during a hearing on this subject, VA has acknowledged that many of these claims were not adjudicated according to VA's own regulations, making this review warranted. While I appreciate the VA's decision, I am very concerned that VA is choosing only to offer to review claims that were denied for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by MST.

The evidence is clear that MST is known to cause both mental and physical conditions—not just PTSD. Furthermore, we know that PTSD is not the only mental health condition that MST survivors can suffer from, as depression and anxiety are also very common. For these reasons, along with VA's own admission that veterans' claims could have been decided incorrectly, The VA should conduct an internal audit to review all MST claims that were denied, regardless of the condition(s) cited at the time of filing.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chellie Pingree", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress