

Dear Senators and Representatives,

Congratulations for being selected to serve on the State Government Conference Committee. Your work in reconciling the difference between the two chamber's bills is important. I write today about the Veterans Restorative Justice Act and the two different versions you will be considering.

The House version, HF 478, has been discussed since the 2019 session, along with its Senate Companion, SF 116. Senators Lang and Howe are co-authors of SF 116. This is the bill that passed the House in 2019, but not the Senate; that passed the Senate 67-0 in 2020, but not the House. In 2021 it was made a better bill through the input of the Senate Judiciary's Counsel. These two bills are supported by numerous stakeholders, including prosecutors, public defenders, Violence Free Minnesota, and veterans groups – including the Minnesota Commanders Task Force. SF 116 should have been the bill in the Senate's omnibus.

How or why the Senate passed SF 1633 instead of SF 116 is not important. What is important for your deliberations is why SF 1633 would have been vigorously opposed by every member organization in the Commanders Task Force and that ultimately, your committee rejects the Senate version and accepts the House version.

The Senate version imposes draconian restrictions on which veterans will have the chance to obtain restorative justice in the future. You may have seen the story about "Jeff" in last Sunday's Star Tribune. He tried to commit "suicide by cop" in St. Paul by waving a knife at Ramsey County Deputies. He was charged with assault – a "crime of violence." He entered Ramsey County Veterans Treatment Court, graduated, and now serves as a mentor to veterans in the Ramsey County VTC. If the Senate version passes, future veterans like Jeff are no longer eligible for VTC. The Senate version turns its back on veterans like Jeff.

Then there's "Jane" in Ramsey County, charged with domestic abuse – a crime of violence. She's a Ramsey County VTC graduate. And if the Senate version passes? Veterans like "Jane" no longer eligible for VTC.

Then there's "Sue" in Washington County, charged with terroristic threats - a crime of violence. She's a graduate of Washington County VTC. And, again, if the Senate version passes? She would not have been eligible; veterans like her no longer eligible.

There is a reason prosecutors, public defenders, and Violence Free Minnesota all agree that the House language's Level 7, D7 should be used: veterans like Jeff, Jane, and Sue and they many more like them and the many more Jeff, Jane, and Sues' to come.

There is a reason the Commanders Task Force opposes the Senate version: we believe no veteran should be left behind, and the Senate version will do exactly that. Despite all the testimony and evidence demonstrating there is no need to, the Senate version will close the

door to future wounded veterans who were charged with a crime of violence when what they needed is help.

I am urging you to stand with all the stakeholders and veterans groups that support the House File 478 language and vote to send the House version to the Governor for enactment.

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