



Mr. Chair and Members, I am Dr. Kristy Janigo, the legislative chair for the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers, where I am a dues-paying member because of my day job as an assistant county veterans service officer. HF 1350 is a request of MACVSO to increase its annual state grant funding by \$60,000 to support its three technical assistance coordinators.

When John Baker became MACVSO's executive director last year, he recognized additional expertise was needed to fully serve women veterans, prevent veteran suicide, and support justice involved veterans. As he was acclimating to his new role, he had conversations with CVSOs about the barriers to serving Minnesota veterans. Along with MACVSO President Josh Beninga of La qui Parle County, he identified the need for technical assistance coordinators willing to be subject matter experts to coach their colleagues across the state. I am the technical assistance coordinator for justice involved veterans because I work for Hennepin County and focus on claims in the veterans treatment court. I have a regular presence in the 4th District Veterans Treatment Court, presided over by Judge Sarah West, the oldest and, by far, the largest veterans treatment court in the state of Minnesota, where I manage the veteran benefits matters of our participants. I have had some great results with these claims, and our court has a strong reputation of reducing recidivism.

Last year was the first year our organization onboarded the TACs. Our executive board identified the three individuals who would provide the expertise. We did this without funding, which was a limiting factor. With this funding, MACVSO can more thoroughly distribute institutional knowledge across its membership. We will be able to afford national training to deepen the technical assistance coordinators' expertise. In my case, the national training is through All Rise, an organization of treatment court professionals with a special track called Justice for Vets where they have established recommendations and training for successful Veterans Treatment Courts. Technical assistance coordinators also need to be able to travel to other counties to provide assistance to other offices, some of which are hours away by car.

Let me further explain why we chose these three areas for technical assistance coordinators. Women veterans is the fastest growing category of veterans, as more and more females are choosing to serve their country. Our issues are not always the same as men's and require a different approach. Military sexual trauma has impacted women veterans in such a way that PTSD disproportionately impacts female veterans compared to our male counterparts.

Suicide impacts the veterans community at disproportionately higher rates than the rest of the U.S. population, with estimates ranging from 17 to 22 veterans a day dying by suicide. And those numbers could be low because of how the reporting may vary by each medical examiner's office across the U.S. We can say with confidence, that we have lost way more veterans to suicide, the war within, than in combat.

And finally, justice involved veterans are some of the most intensive cases any CVSO will work with because of complexities in this population. Veterans who have gotten in trouble with the law often have found themselves in that situation because of underlying substance use disorders, mental health conditions, brain conditions such as TBI, and chronic pain from in-service injuries.

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Justice involved veterans' personal relationships have also deteriorated, and some are currently experiencing homelessness. In this work, I have helped save veterans' homes from foreclosure, have assisted homeless and justice involved veterans obtain permanent housing, have helped persuade veterans to finally seek mental health services they desperately need, have assisted veterans to pay for vehicle repairs through grant funding so they could continue to hold down steady employment, and have given veterans a sense of validation when the federal government recognizes their disabilities through the granting of compensation. For the women in our veterans treatment court, military sexual trauma is often an underlying factor in their justice involvement. Some of the veterans I have helped were trying to become service connected for years, decades in some cases, and they needed someone relentless who would not stop advocating for them and would support them along the way in navigating a very complex system.

One of my favorite success stories is a veteran who was struggling with a fentanyl addiction. I first met him down at the jail where he was wearing an orange jumpsuit. He had tried for VA benefits a number of years ago, but he missed his compensation and pension exams because he was experiencing homelessness and could not get there. I made a promise to him that he would make his C&P exams under my watch, and I once drove him as far as to Wisconsin for an exam. Now he has a restart, is substance free, in stable housing, with 100% permanent and total service connection, meaning he has free health services at VA including dental, and his future children will have education benefits. This is public safety as well. We reduce recidivism in our court.

Chair and members, this work is a righteous mission. And with just a small amount of funding, you can support us in helping those who sacrificed so much for our freedoms.

-Dr. Kristy Janigo

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kristy A. Janigo". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

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