



VIOLENCE FREE
MINNESOTA
THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

March 3, 2021

Chair Mariani and Members of the House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Letter in Support for HF 478– The Veteran’s Restorative Justice Act

Dear Chair Mariani and Members of the Committee:

Violence Free Minnesota is writing in support of HF 478 – The Veteran’s Restorative Justice Act (VRJA). Violence Free Minnesota is a statewide coalition with over 90 member programs who provide advocacy and services to domestic and sexual violence victim survivors in all of Minnesota’s 87 counties.

When perpetrators of domestic violence, including veterans, have a history of violence – whether it be through a criminal record, protective orders through family court, or any other known history – these are points of contact and intervention. These points of contact/intervention are an opportunity where we might have changed the perpetrator’s behavior through programming, and this bill could provide that opportunity to certain veterans who use violence. While we would prefer that the scope of this type of reform legislation was much broader than just veterans, we are supportive of the opportunity for people who use harm to participate in programming to transform abusive behaviors.

For over four decades, Minnesota has invested in the criminal justice system as the primary response to violence, relying on incarceration and the threat of incarceration to change behavior. This approach provided, at best, a temporary reprieve from violence for some victims, but our decades of experiences and data show that this approach has not ended violence and abuse in our homes and communities. Cycles of trauma, coercion, and destructive coping mechanisms are not addressed in meaningful or transformative ways within the confines of prison. This bill provides an opportunity for veteran perpetrators of violence to get connected to programming to address their traumas and change their behaviors.

The solution to domestic violence is not to lock away a perpetrator forever. It is not to release them into the community without any programming. The solution is to promote programming that has been shown to transform behavior, to prevent future violence, to increase safety and to save the lives of domestic violence victims and their children. For these reasons, Violence Free Minnesota supports HF 478 – The Veteran’s Restorative Justice Act.

Sincerely,

Liz Richards
Executive Director
Violence Free Minnesota

Katie Kramer
Policy Director
Violence Free Minnesota