

Good afternoon, Chairman Green, Vice chairman Greenspan and ranking member Sheehy.

I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 387, which would designate a bridge in Austintown Township as the “Women’s Veterans Bridge “.

Women have served our country through all periods of American history. Whether disguised as male soldiers during the American Revolution, as nurses in World War II, or as helicopter pilots in Afghanistan.

Yet too often, the contribution of women in uniform has been overlooked, even by women themselves.

During the Revolutionary War, many women served informally as seamstresses, water bearers, nurses and cooks. Other women fought alongside their husbands or operated as spies for the cause.

When the Civil War began in 1861, thousands of women volunteered as nurses, and hundreds more dressed as young men and boys to fight on the battlefield.

Women didn't serve formally in the military until congress established the Army Nurse Corps in 1901.

By World War II, more than 350,000 American women served in uniform, both at home and abroad.

Approximately 543 military women died in the line of duty and 84 others were held as prisoners of war during that time.

Women's role in war had expanded from the Women's Army Corps to the Women's Air Force service pilots. They drove trucks, repaired air planes, operated radios, analyzed intelligence, and much, much more.

In 1948, the Women's Armed Services Integrations Act granted women permanent status in the Air force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy.

Women remained a small minority of the armed forces population until 1967 when the gender cap was lifted. Several laws in the 1970s and early 1980s granted women veterans' status for the first time.

Today, Women make up around 20% of the new recruits, 15 % of active duty military and 18% of guard and reserve forces.

Women serve in every branch of our military. Of the more than 280,000 women sent to Iraq and Afghanistan, 44% enlisted and 13% of the officers have been deployed two or more times.

Just as the number of women in uniform has grown, so has the number of veterans. Of the almost 22 million veterans in U.S. today, 10 % are women.

Projections show women will make up 20% of the total Veteran population in the next 30 years.

State legislatures across the country are recognizing the contribution of female veterans. I am proud that our Ohio legislatures continue to honor all veterans-men and women.

I am happy and honored Mr. Chairman to be here today on behalf of my sister veterans to play a small part in honoring their service and I would like this committee to know that I am always at your service to support and help with Veteran's issues.

In closing, I would request the naming of the bridge in Austintown township to honor women veterans for their service. I am proud that Ohio is, and remains to be, a leader in support of our Ohio veterans.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent Testimony on House Bill 387 and at this point, I welcome any questions.

Testimony provided by Leo H Connelly Jr. on Wednesday, December 6, 2017.