

House State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 195 – Women Veterans’ Day
Sponsor Testimony
1 MAY 2019

Chair Perales, Vice Chair Hood, and members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 195. And thank you to my joint sponsor, Assistant Majority Whip Lanese, for working with me on this important piece of legislation.

While President Truman signed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act in 1948, it would be 45-years before the Pentagon, under the direction of Defense Secretary Les Aspin, would lift the ban on women serving on combat aircraft and warships in 1993. It took time for Aspin’s directive to make an impact. It wasn’t until 1998 that female fighter pilots flew into combat for the first time as part of a four-day bombing campaign on Iraq and Kathleen McGrath became the first woman to command a Navy warship. In that same year, Heather Wilson—now Secretary of the Air Force—was elected to represent New Mexico’s First Congressional District, becoming the first female military veteran to complete a full term in Congress. It was a privilege of mine to intern for her. In 2005, Leigh Ann Hester, an Army National Guard soldier would become the first woman since the end of WWII to earn the Silver Star for her service after she outmaneuvered 50-insurgent fighters in Iraq, assaulting and clearing two trenches 8-years before Secretary Leon Panetta lifted the ban on women serving in combat altogether.

This is not to say the progress women veterans have made have been limited to our most recent history. In the 65-years in-between Truman signed the Integration Act into law and Secretary Panetta lifted the ban on full participation, women made tremendous strides within the United States Armed Forces. In 1967, President Johnson signed Public Law 90-130, removing the ceiling placed on women’s promotions as officers. Just three years later, in 1970, Anna Mae Hays, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, would become the first women to serve as a Brigadier General. In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 94-106, which permitted women to attend the United States Service Academies. Five years later, nearly 200 women graduated from the United States Military Academy, Naval Academy, Coast Guard Academy, and my alma mater, the Air Force Academy.

During my own time at the United States Air Force Academy, I met my wife, Amanda, who remains one of the most capable veterans I have ever had the honor of knowing, and she remains in the ready reserve to this day. I am continuously inspired by her persistence and resolve. At the Academy, she was part of a class that was 80% male and went through more than anyone who serves our country ever should. Despite living through attempted sexual assault, sexual harassment, and vulgar comments, she found the strength to persevere. In a testament to her toughness, she completed the Academy's brutal Recognition, or "Hell Week," with broken toes. Maybe that's why she graduated with a higher class rank than I did and why she is the Commander in Chief of our home today.

Amanda's story and experience is not a unique one. Most, if not all, of this country's women veterans, have gone through similar trials and tribulations. It is my hope that in passing this legislation, we will not only honor the achievement of those brave women who served and are serving but that we will inspire today's young women to future service. To show them how valuable their contributions can be and to welcome their future service in the United States Armed Forces. Chair Perales, Vice Chair Hood, and members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.