

Good morning, Chairman Uecker, Vice Chairman Wilson, and Ranking Member Thomas. Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 311 which would designate June 12<sup>th</sup> as Women Veterans Day.

My name is Jo Wildman, Chief Warrant Officer (retired), U.S. Coast Guard. I started my military career in 1983, by enlisting in the U.S. Navy, as a Fire Control Technician, maintaining and operating weapon systems. In 1989, with the Navy's Fire Control Technician rating then closed to women, myself as well as other women were forced into an alternate career path by either selecting another rating, or leaving the Navy. At that time, I chose to continue my service as a Fire Control Technician by transferring to the Coast Guard, where I served on active duty until my retirement in 2012.

Women have served this nation throughout all periods of US History, many serving on the battlefields alongside men, but not always receiving the same recognition. Women were first formally included during WWI with the enlistment of approximately 12,000 women in the Navy and another 300 in the Marines, primarily for administrative duties. Women were called on again during WWII to fill billets vacated by men going off to war. These WWI and WWII positions were temporary and when the wars were over, the women were sent home.

With the signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act by President Harry Truman on June 12, 1948, women became a permanent part of the military. However, restrictions within the Act itself prevented the full integration of women. Restrictions such as: a 2% cap on the number of women; women limited to certain ratings and excluded from participating in combat; women under 21 requiring the signature of their parents; and only single women with no dependent children were accepted.

Slowly, various restrictions preventing full integration of women into the military have been lifted. In 1978, the Coast Guard was the first military service to open all ratings and positions to anyone qualified. As of January 2016, all military positions within all the military services are open to anyone who qualifies. This finally allows for the full integration of women into the Armed Forces.

Women veterans today remain overshadowed by their male counterparts. This past summer I attended a veteran's program at one of Ohio's county fair, where a photographer for a local newspaper was walking around taking pictures of veterans. Identified by my military ball cap, he asked to take my picture. However, an unidentifiable woman veteran a few rows behind me was not asked. I introduced myself to this woman and engaged her in conversation, learning that she had taken advantage of a free haircut offered to veterans with her, now deceased, veteran husband. When she went to pay, the cashier requested proof of her veteran status, but did not

request the same from her husband.

A few years ago, I took part in an event at a professional sporting event supposedly to recognize women veterans. The event turned out to actually honor both the families of veterans and women veterans. Although not the intention, the event seemed to present women veterans as less of a veteran, and more equal to those of families of the male veterans.

I know of women veterans, while wearing military apparel such as sweatshirts or hats, being asked about their husbands' service. However, I do not know of any men, while wearing military apparel, being questioned about their wives' military service.

In summary, the designation of June 12<sup>th</sup> as Women Veterans Day would be a way to recognize and highlight Ohio's women veterans and the contributions they have made, while increasing Ohio's awareness of their women veterans.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Senate Bill 311. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Jo Wildman, CWO4, U.S. Coast Guard (Retired)