

**NINETY-SIXTH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Charlotte, North Carolina
August 26, 27, 28, 2014**

Resolution No. 67: Military Sexual Trauma

Origin: Colorado

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Military Sexual Trauma (MST) impacts thousands of brave men and women in the Armed Forces; and

WHEREAS, In FY2010, Department of Defense (DOD) estimated that only 13.5 percent of MST incidents were reported; and

WHEREAS, In addition, reporting of MST is frequently followed by a lackluster investigation and prosecution, with many resulting in administrative or dishonorable discharge rather than Uniform Code of Military Justice prosecution; and

WHEREAS, DOD does not have a policy of permanently maintaining files of reported incidents of MST, creating evidentiary roadblocks for future Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims; and

WHEREAS, A history of MST has correlations to many health and economic consequences, including PTSD, sexually transmitted infections, homelessness, and substance abuse; and

WHEREAS, According to a 2010 report published by the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), entitled "Review of Combat Stress in Women Veterans Receiving VA Health Care and Disability Benefits," Women Veterans Coordinators (WVCs) are frequently underutilized due to lack of public awareness of the services and assistance provided by WVCs; and

WHEREAS, According to the same OIG report, women veterans are disproportionately granted Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) claims based on MST; for instance, 9 percent of PTSD claims granted to women veterans by Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) were on the basis of MST, compared to only 0.1 percent of male veterans; and

WHEREAS, MST claims and treatment involve delicate, sensitive emotional issues; and

WHEREAS, VBA lacks a complete assessment of its system-wide MST-related workload and outcomes, without which it cannot determine if additional MST-specific training and testing is necessary; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 26, 27, 28, 2014, That The American Legion urge the Department of Defense (DOD) to improve its investigation and prosecution of reported cases of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) to be on par with the civilian system; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the DOD to examine the underreporting of MST and to permanently maintain records of reported MST allegations, thereby expanding victims' access to documented evidence which is necessary for future Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the VA to ensure that all VA medical centers, vet centers, and community-based outpatient clinics employ a MST counselor to oversee the screening and treatment referral process, and to continue universal screening of all veterans for a history of MST; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the VA to review military personnel files in all MST claims and apply reduced criteria to MST-related PTSD to match that of combat-related PTSD; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the VA to employ additional Women Veterans Coordinators (WVCs) and to provide MST sensitivity training to claims processors and WVCs; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the VA to conduct an analysis of MST claims volume, assess the consistency of how these claims are adjudicated, and determine the need, if any, for additional training and testing on processing of these claims.