

JON TESTER, MONTANA  
CHAIRMAN  
PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON  
BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT  
SHERROD BROWN, OHIO  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT  
MAZIE HIRONO, HAWAII  
JOE MANCHIN III, WEST VIRGINIA  
KYRSTEN SINEMA, ARIZONA  
MAGGIE HASSAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
ANGUS S. KING, JR., MAINE  
TONY McCLAIN, STAFF DIRECTOR

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

JERRY MORAN, KANSAS  
RANKING MEMBER  
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS  
BILL CASSIDY, LOUISIANA  
MIKE ROUNDS, SOUTH DAKOTA  
THOM TILLIS, NORTH CAROLINA  
DAN SULLIVAN, ALASKA  
MARSHA BLACKBURN, TENNESSEE  
KEVIN CRAMER, NORTH DAKOTA  
TOMMY TUBERVILLE, ALABAMA  
DAVID SHEARMAN, STAFF DIRECTOR

July 15, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1010 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Denis McDonough  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20420


Dear Secretaries Austin and McDonough,

I write today to reiterate my concern with the lack of coordination between the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) in informing servicemembers who have experienced a military sexual trauma (MST) about the VA resources available to them. I was disappointed to see DOD's Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military has no mention of efforts taken to inform servicemembers of their eligibility to receive confidential counseling at VA's Vet Centers or their potential eligibility to receive MST-related services at VA medical centers and outpatient clinics. Survivors have endured the unimaginable and deserve to know about all of their options for health care and services. That starts with DOD and VA taking immediate steps to make sure survivors are aware of the tools available to them to address their trauma.

I initially raised my concerns on this issue in an August 15, 2023, letter to DOD and VA regarding the findings of a Government Accountability Office report pointing to a greater need for collaboration between your Departments in providing resources for servicemembers, especially transitioning servicemembers, who have experienced unwanted sexual behaviors or MST. After receiving responses from both DOD and VA reaffirming the Departments' commitment to spreading greater awareness of VA resources for MST survivors, I was disappointed to find few mentions of this commitment in the recent DOD report. In fact – the only mention of Vet Centers throughout the more than 800-page document is the finding that, of active component women who experienced unwanted sexual contact and reported the incident to military authorities, 33 percent received no information about the confidential counseling services available to them through Vet Centers.

As DOD continues its work to prevent and respond to MST, I call on the Department to take quick action to improve its efforts to provide servicemembers with information on the VA MST-related resources available to them. Vet Centers, in particular, can provide survivors with a safe, confidential option for addressing their mental health needs outside of DOD. Survivors deserve to know these resources exist and are accessible to them.

Sincerely,



---

Jon Tester  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs