



# Duckworth joins Tester, Murkowski & Pingree in re-introducing legislation to support survivors of military sexual trauma

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer  
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator and combat Veteran Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined U.S. Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-ME-1) this week in re-introducing bipartisan legislation to improve resources and care for survivors of military sexual trauma (MST). The *Servicemember and Veterans' Empowerment and Support Act* expands the definition of MST to ensure servicemembers and Veterans who experience online sexual harassment can access VA counseling and benefits. It also codifies a lower burden of proof so more survivors are eligible for trauma and mental health care related to MST, even if they didn't feel comfortable reporting the event to their chain of command while in service.

“No one should ever have to experience sexual trauma, especially our brave men and women in uniform,” Duckworth said. “We must make reporting and seeking care for military sexual assault easier, and we owe it to survivors of military sexual trauma to give them the support they need and deserve. I’m proud to join Senators Tester and Murkowski and Congresswoman Pingree on this important bill to make that a reality.”

The *Servicemember and Veterans' Empowerment and Support Act* would make sure that more mental health diagnoses related to MST qualify for VA service-connected benefits, and requires the VA to have specially-trained claims raters processing MST-related benefits claims, addressing an issue recently uncovered by VA's Office of Inspector General. Additionally, in an effort to encourage more victims to come

forward, the bill requires military officials to educate servicemembers about available VA care services for military sexual trauma survivors at all VA healthcare facilities across the country.

The bill is cosponsored by Senators Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patty Murray (D-WA) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Representatives Julia Brownley (D-CA-26), Debbie Dingell (D-MI-12), Gwen Moore (D-WI-4), Bobby Rush (D-IL-1), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Suzan DelBene (D-WA-1), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ-3), Gregorio Sablan (D-MP), Annie Kuster (D-NH-2), and Zoe Lofgren (D-CA-19). The *Servicemember and Veterans' Empowerment and Support Act* is endorsed by Disabled American Veterans (DAV).