

From: Women's Legislative Caucus  
To: House General, Housing, and Military Affairs Committee  
Re: H. 401

Dear Representative Stevens and members of the Committee:

On behalf of members of the Women's Legislative Caucus, we would like to offer strong support for H. 401, a bill proposing the creation of a Chief Diversity Officer within the Vermont National Guard. The bill also would require an annual report on gender equity in the Guard, and the Guard's efforts to recruit, retain, and promote women as officers at the highest levels.

Our caucus has heard that there are a number of issues regarding sexual discrimination and sexual assault that are currently not being addressed by Guard leadership. At issue is the threat of career reprisal in reporting discrimination and assault. During General Knight's campaign for Adjutant General, he promised to take this issue seriously. However efforts are falling short.

Previously, various strategies were promoted by the State Equal Employment Manager who has since retired. Despite the fact that she did not have direct command authority, she was able to make some progress on these issues. In testimony before our caucus, this former Manager recommends the appointment of a Chief Diversity Officer who answers to the Governor, rather than to Guard leadership.

It is shocking and unconscionable that women in our Vermont National Guard do not have the protections necessary for them to do their jobs without fear of discrimination, assault, and reprisal. It is imperative that we as a legislature take strong steps to ensure a safe and welcoming atmosphere for women in the Guard. Beyond that, given the nexus between sex-based offenses and the representation of women in command positions, we need to make sure that women can rise to the highest levels of leadership.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and our comments.

Representative Lynn Batchelor, Co-chair  
Representative Mollie S. Burke, Co-chair  
Representative Jean O'Sullivan, Co-chair  
Representative Marybeth Redmont, Communications Liaison