

Testimony from Retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Doris Jean Sumner for the H.401 Bill to the General Assembly of the State of Vermont, House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs

*This bill proposes to create the position of Chief Diversity Officer within the Vermont National Guard and to require the Adjutant and Inspector General to submit an annual report on gender equity in the Vermont National Guard and the Guard's efforts and programs to recruit, retain, and promote women to be senior noncommissioned officers, warrant officers, and senior commissioned officers.*

Thank you for considering my testimony regarding this important bill. I submitted in writing and will read from some of it here. I am Doris J. Sumner, Retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 from the Vermont Army National Guard. I retired from the Military and Federal workforce of the Vermont Guard in March 2019. My last assignment for the Guard was in the Human Resource Office as the State Equal Employment Manager serving the Federal workforce of approximately 930 employees. In military status, I was the Joint Force Headquarters Human Resource Equal Opportunity Officer serving the Army Guard personnel of approximately 2,400 soldiers. I held both of those positions for over 13 years. I also held the collateral duty assignment as the State Diversity Coordinator for 13 years serving all National Guard members to include Federal Technicians. In my tenure, I was appointed as the Regional and National Chairs for the State Equal Employment Managers and the Joint Diversity Executive Committee Councils. I was often sought after to participate on national panels, speak or facilitate trainings at National Conferences and was an Adjunct Instructor at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. I received numerous awards for my work mostly associated with gender diversity and the goal of preventing sex-based offenses in the military. I received the Army Commendation Medal, Women of the Year from the Federal Women's Program, State Equal Employment of the Year, Army Individual Excellence in Diversity Award 2018 and Vermont received the Joint Excellence in Diversity Award 2017, culminating in the Legion of Merit upon my retirement. I am proud of the work I accomplished yet disheartened at the work left to do.

I take no pleasure in pointing out what remains dysfunctional in the Guard or the Military as a whole. Let me be clear, there is a lot commendable about the Vermont National Guard, not everyone is having a bad time, in fact most people love their experience, but that does not dismiss the issue we are here to discuss today. I salute authentic efforts to improve the command climates, and solidify the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Programs however the

strategies nor the priorities are at the pace to cement the lasting change needed to prevent sex-based harm from happening. I could enjoy the benefits of retirement and let the new generation continue on however, I joined in 1981 where sexism was a documented problem for the Military and despite valiant efforts to diminish the issues, sexism remains a problem. I feel a sense of duty, to do what I can, to contribute to the objective of eradicating needless harm.

I spent my entire adult profession in the Army, 3 years of Active Duty and 33 years in the Vermont National Guard. My husband is a Veteran who deployed to combat 3 times. We are patriots and love our United States Armed Services with significant gratitude to the Vermont National Guard. The intent of my testimony is to improve the effectiveness and increase the opportunities for under-represented groups, specifically women because gender crosses all characteristics of diversity. The purpose of the bill is to give our State National Guard the tools necessary to make progress diversifying the power core of our force and thus shift the cultural landscape which has a documented history of a sexist culture impacting the lives of our service members. We cannot deny the impacts of sex-based harm right here in Vermont, the last two Adjutant Generals ran on platforms to defeat sexism. Vermont has the historic recognition of appointing the first ever female Adjutant General after 361 years of male leaders. Retired Major General Martha Rainville brought the cultural shift needed, after a long tenure with Major General Edwards authoritarian style.

There is a plethora of evidence to confirm diversity at all levels improves the effectiveness, innovation and retention for organizations. Yet the Military, specifically the National Guard lags behind in meeting diversity goals throughout the organization much due to nepotism and cronyism.

In a June 2019 Report entitled: Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity in the Armed Services: Background and Issues for Congress, produced by Congressional Research Service (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/R44321>), it states,

QUOTE: *Some have argued that military policies and programs that support diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity can enhance the services' ability to attract, recruit and retain top talent. Other advocates for a diverse force believe that it is in the best interest of the military to recruit and retain a military force that is representative of the nation as a broadly representative military force is more likely to uphold national values and to be loyal to the government—and country—that raised it.* They contend that in order to reflect the nation it serves; the military should strive for diversity

*that reflects the demographics of the entire country. Proponents of expanding diversity initiatives contend that a more diverse force has the potential to be a better performing and more efficient force.* END QUOTE

Why is a law to hire a Diversity Officer needed in Vermont? Minority representation in the guard is approximately 7%, slightly higher than the overall representation in Vermont, this looks good. The percentage of women in the Guard averages 15%, a percent lower than what it was in 2012 and only 3% higher than 2005. Women in Command positions in the guard range from 7-10%, often with women being the only Senior level leader in a room full of men. Women are 51% of the Vermont population. Why is this disparity still ok?

The Chief National Guard Bureau Instruction 9651.01A dated 20 August 2018 applies to all NG elements. The policy is to institutionalize diversity and inclusion, it states: TAGs and the Command Generals **may** develop State diversity and inclusion initiatives and procedures to implement NG policy in support of diversity and inclusion goals IAW the NG Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.

The National Guard Bureau has provided the policy however staffing resources have been at the discretion of the TAGs. And there is a lack of oversight by NGB, DOD and EEOC on the federal programs, specifically Diversity and Inclusion and Special Emphasis Programs, such as the Women's Program.

There are some basic problems with staffing Diversity assets, one being, every proponent in the Guard claims under-staffing issues. It is the TAG and the Joint Senior Leaders who determine the priorities. There are NO diversity subject matter experts on the Vermont Joint Senior Leader Council.

The Diversity instruction uses the word 'may' therefore it is optional to develop diversity initiatives and no repercussions if the VT Guard does nothing. As my retirement approached the agency put out an ad for my position in which only one candidate would be found qualified, minimizing the pool from which to find the best fit. They selected a person who has since given his notice and is working part time often from home and the new employee will not start until April. In the interim, many of the initiatives I stood up have collapsed. These were strategies my team employed in support of diversity. 33 Diversity Boards around the State in the Armories, changed quarterly for over a decade, showcasing the TAG's inclusion strategies they have remained unchanged, the bi-annual diversity newsletter (produced

for 13 years) which prominently featured a Senior Leader on the front page has not been produced, and monthly Lean In Meetings where employees gathered to discuss gender barriers and countermeasures have been inconsistently coordinated. A Diversity Manager would maintain these types of strategies.

EO Officers handle cases and assist the command with identifying trends (why are conflicts happening, how can we build a more inclusive environment). Speaking about the Army Guard, there are minimum staffing requirements yet throughout my tenure, I continuously urged leaders to fill the positions at the Joint Force Headquarters. The JFHQ is the company who has the most senior high-ranking personnel in it, approximately 140 soldiers. The EO Office in the JFHQ is mandated to have 2 high ranking soldiers to run the program for the TAG. Since 2005, the office has not been staffed according to the regulation. I took the position as a Junior Warrant Officer and did not have additional help until the end of 2017. I addressed the 140 soldiers last March and I urged the unit full of senior officers to help General Knight by applying for my job. Still, no officer, Major or above has ever volunteered to be the EO officer as required. Currently the NCO who came in 2017, is running the program by herself. Equal Opportunity plays a critical role in monitoring the command climate and providing Senior Leaders with the essential information and recommendations to continuously improve the conditions of the work centers. The Diversity Program or the EO Program will never be sufficiently staffed unless those in power elevate the status of the roles these positions play.

The Air Guard has authorizations for Equal Opportunity who have conducted their duties however they were less than enthusiastic with regard to the topic of gender equality.

All of the cases, both Air and Army, Military and Civilian, I processed in my tenure were sexual harassment or conflict based on gender discrimination. Commanders are responsible to restore good order and discipline when violations are substantiated. As the program manager, I identified the trends associated with equal opportunity to stem from a sexist command climate based on gender bias. This assessment was based on years of case studies, unit climate surveys, focus groups and a series of gender issue surveys followed by the 2011 Military Women's Workshop (the first of its kind in the NG) which developed 21 recommendations to increase the representation of women and minimize the effects of sexism. These 21 recommendations closely mirrored the DoD's Military Leadership Diversity Commission's recommendations. Through the Military Women's Program (volunteers) we attempted to coordinate the

implementation of the recommendations beginning with the #1 recommendation, a policy to allow mothers time and space to pump milk and store in support of breast feeding, a lactation policy. That is correct, in 2011 the Vermont National Guard did not have a lactation policy. It took 2 years (2013) to produce a policy and often women are still culturally shamed for requesting the accommodation. There are few permanent rooms and units are less than enthusiastic to make room in accordance with the policy when mothers do have the confidence to ask. A policy without inclusion does little to change a culture.

Vermont is not worse or better than other NG organizations, the entire DoD has documented tragic issues related to sex-based offenses and the handling of such harm to service members. We all remember Senator McSally's powerful testimony. Much of the gender bias creating a sexist culture is unconscious and unintentional as documented in a study for the integration of women in combat, called "Project Diane", however the impact is still damaging.

Recruiter bias/sexism regarding who would be the best in recruitable MOS's/branches, etc. continues. Here is an example, every football game has 4 major groups to recruit to: football players, cheerleaders, marching/band members and all their parents. Generally, recruiters only focus on the football players and do not even consider the other 3 groups. There is often Command assignment bias, women getting traditional assignments thus they are not set up to be competitive for Battalion and higher commands. Who is overseeing these data points? Many reports to include the one quoted earlier confirm, gender bias is increased in male-dominated environments. Assimilation is the survival tool.

Based on hundreds of official Department of Defense assessments regarding sexual harassment and assault in the military to include the Military Leadership Diversity Commission Report and the DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the military the common theme ALWAYS point to leadership and the culture as the systemic problem regarding the prevalence of sex-based offenses. And this summation was always a part of the annual gender report developed under my leadership for the Vermont Military Women's Program.

***How can you change a culture if those in power are not convinced the culture needs to change? Or if they do see the need for change, do not know how or have the tools to change it?*** In 2013 during the process to appoint a new Adjutant General, there was public attention concerning inappropriate processing of sexual assaults. After General Cray was appointed, he tasked General Heston to lead a task force to do everything it could do to combat sexism. I was

specifically asked to be on the task force and played an instrumental role in laying out the strategic objectives. When our team suggested the task force be called, “Cultural Transformation Task Force”, there was a lot of grumbling over the name because according to sources, ‘it was not a sexy name, also they were saying, what culture did we need to change if we are so awesome?’ Having pride in your unit is natural and necessary, so to create a task force to look at what is wrong, was challenging for many. General Heston backed the name and the work we attempted to do. The task force waned and eventually diluted into the Diversity Council. I am writing a book because each and everything the Task Force tried to do over the years required grit, persistence, convincing and volunteers without authoritative official authorizations. And we did a lot but it was always uphill and not without sacrifice because sexism and sexual assaults are still happening for our troops. The culture is not changing despite independent victories because there is a resistance and no oversight on the continuum, 2 steps forward, 1 step back. Women cannot be appointed into top leader positions; they must be developed and then selected into them and the culture is not lending itself to attract, retain and promote women into the top positions, thus the cultural power core remains very androcentric.

We work on what we measure and without a dedicated Diversity Manager with the authority to solicit the appropriate data, the all-male Senior Leaders of the Guard are inconsistently making decisions at the detriment of our readiness. We are focused on women, because predominately women have been the service members reporting the negative experiences however, we know men suffer too, we all suffer.

I do not believe General Knight or any top leader is intentionally insensitive to the issues of sexism for women, however, the sense of urgency to change a culture which has historically benefited their circles of influence will take bold leadership and accountability.

I have a book full of examples to explain how gender bias is impacting our Vermonters, but for now, I would like to give you two examples to complete my testimony. The first is a letter from a current member of the Guard who has no doubt she will be reprimed against despite the anonymous submission, because reprisal is subtle, it is hard to pinpoint exclusionary attitudes, but those being reprimed against, can feel it.

*QUOTE: “The Vermont Guard does a lot of things right with regard to being an organization where anyone can succeed, given enough drive and determination. I have the luxury of being part of this organization and being a leader*

*within this organization. As a woman, I have been afforded opportunities most women have not. I have served in Combat Arms. I have been able to mentor young female and male leaders. With the right amount of intestinal fortitude and determination you can succeed, the question is more why is it this hard for females? Does it have to be? Why do I still attend meetings decades after joining, where I am the only female in the room? I have actually reached the point during some meetings where I stop talking because no one is listening. The only way to correct the Vermont Guard is to increase the number of females to 30% of the overall force. We need to create an environment where they can't be the prey, which only occurs where there are enough to change the culture. The females they promote to the most Senior positions are those that won't rock the boat, they are good with status quo. I have been mentored by some amazing male officers however we need to increase representation and number of females in the organization. That is the only way to eliminate the sexism. I have watched other SR Female Officers get ignored when explaining things, even when they are the Subject Matter Expert (SME). However, when a man says the same things just after it is like the heavens parted and god spoke. I truly love this organization or I would not take the time to write. I believe we can be better and everyone should have the tremendous opportunity to join and lead if they choose. We need to eliminate the sexism or we continue the predatory landscape where there continues to be sanctuary for those that do women harm." END QUOTE*

The second;

As a newly enlisted member in 1986, sexual harassment was very apparent, accepted and tolerated in the VT National Guard. During this time, there were no avenues for support or a safe place to speak confidentially about the harmful environment many of the females endured. None of us spoke to our supervisors about this, it was just known that speaking out would place our careers in jeopardy.

Working in an organization dominated by males in leadership positions, applying for and being selected for a job vacancy was few and far between. When I was selected for an officer position in 1999, leadership stated I was not their "first choice," and the Airman originally selected was found to have a medical condition that disqualified him for the position. When I started as an officer, I was told: "you're not strong enough, assertive, or extroverted enough to be in a leadership position." Sadly, my officer career entailed mostly "administrative duties" up through my retirement in 2019.

Reflecting on the history of the VT National Guard, it was not uncommon for shop supervisors, management and senior leadership positions to be filled by men. Equality was not practiced in the early years, and only within the last few years do I feel the organization is directing its focus on becoming more diverse.

The VT National Guard has a long way to go to become a more diverse organization and will need to set in motion recruiting and retention by placing more females in leadership roles. Many of us would still be part of the VT National Guard if we had the opportunity to lead, but those of us who refused to support the status quo were placed in nominal positions until we retired.

We need an advocate to help navigate the VT National Guard in the right direction to recruit more females into the Guard. The female Soldiers and Airmen have a voice, the drive, integrity, and vision to make the VT National Guard a better organization; let them lead. END QUOTE

Governor Scott is the Commander in Chief of the Vermont Guard and the Vermont citizens deserve a National Guard that is doing everything possible to protect the Vermonters who choose to serve in the honorable profession of our Military. Vermonters can lead the way to boldly tackle sexism through diversity.

In closing, the H.401 bill will give the Vermont Adjutant General an asset to fully manage the diversity needed in the Guard to combat sexism for all.

#### References:

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity in the Armed Services: Background and Issues for Congress Updated June 5, 2019

Project Diane: Integrating Military Women in Combat Roles 01/12/2016

From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Military, Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 15 March 2011