

HOUSE No. 3711

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Shirley B. Arriaga

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to enhancing outreach for women veterans.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Shirley B. Arriaga</i>	<i>8th Hampden</i>	<i>1/20/2023</i>
<i>Steven George Xiarhos</i>	<i>5th Barnstable</i>	<i>6/22/2023</i>

HOUSE No. 3711

By Representative Arriaga of Chicopee, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3711) of Shirley B. Arriaga for legislation to establish the women veterans' network in the Department of Veterans' Services. Veterans and Federal Affairs.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)**

An Act relative to enhancing outreach for women veterans.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 2 of chapter 115 of the General Laws, as amended by section 30 of
2 chapter 144 of the acts of 2022, is hereby amended by adding the following paragraph:-

3 The secretary shall oversee and maintain the women veterans' network established in
4 section 18.

5 SECTION 2. Said chapter 115, as amended by section 18 of chapter 154 of the acts of
6 2022, is hereby amended by adding the following section:-

7 Section 18. (a) For the purposes of this section the following term shall, unless the
8 context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meaning:

9 "Women veterans' network", a program, within the department of veterans' services, that
10 identifies women veterans in the commonwealth and informs them about their potential
11 eligibility for benefits they may have earned through their service.

12 (b) There shall be established the women veterans' network in the department of veterans'
13 services. The women veterans' network shall: (i) conduct outreach to women veterans living in
14 the commonwealth and make them aware of eligible benefits available to them; (ii) register
15 women veterans for the women veterans' network and collect current information on women
16 veterans in the commonwealth; (iii) create a database to store women veteran's registered
17 information that shall include, but not be limited to, the following information: the name,
18 residential address, telephone numbers and email address of each woman veteran in the
19 commonwealth; (iv) expand awareness of the needs of women veterans in the commonwealth
20 and identify available health and human resources to meet their needs; (v) create a women
21 veterans' network newsletter containing information on benefits, programs, resources and events
22 for women veterans; and (vi) host a conference with keynote speakers, workshops, networking
23 opportunities and a panel on topics that are relevant to women veterans in the commonwealth.

24 (c) The women veterans' network shall appoint a director to manage the organization. The
25 director's duties and responsibilities shall include, but not be limited to: (i) meeting with women
26 veterans in the commonwealth in order to assist them with services and available benefits; (ii)
27 reporting directly to the secretary of veterans' services on the women veterans' network activities;
28 (iii) holding events to promote and expand the membership of the women veterans' network
29 including, but not limited to: informational fairs, workshops and public events; (iv) overseeing,
30 maintaining and updating yearly the database of women veterans' registered information in the
31 commonwealth; (v) collaborating with the department of veteran services for outreach to other
32 state and federal agencies and non-profits that serve women veterans to identify resources,
33 improvements to programs and services to women veterans, particularly in terms of healthcare,
34 counseling, employment, education and housing; (vi) collaborating with directors of veterans'

35 services in cities and towns departments of veterans' services, established in section 10, for
36 outreach to women veterans to promote programs and services, particularly in terms of
37 healthcare, counseling, employment, education and housing; (vii) preparing reports as required
38 and requested by the secretary of veterans' services and the joint committee on veterans and
39 federal affairs; (viii) maintaining a speaker's bureau of Massachusetts women veterans to
40 enhance awareness of women veterans' contributions to the commonwealth; (ix) overseeing the
41 women veterans' network's website, newsletter and social media; and (x) maintaining continuing
42 education and awareness programs of current and emerging issues that impact women veterans
43 in the commonwealth.

44 (d)(1) Subject to appropriation, the secretary shall provide grants to the women veterans'
45 network for implementing programs to improve outreach and assistance to women veterans and
46 their families in cities and towns in commonwealth. The programs shall ensure that women
47 veterans are fully informed about available veterans' benefits and programs.

48 (2) The grants to the women veterans' network shall: (i) implement or enhance outreach
49 activities for women veterans; (ii) expand, implement or otherwise enhance existing programs
50 and services in the preparation, presentation and prosecution of claims for women veterans
51 benefits by directors of veterans' services in cities and towns departments of veterans' services
52 established in section 10; and (iii) prioritize programs that are in areas with: (A) a large
53 population of women veterans; (B) a critical shortage of veterans' service officers; (C) high rates
54 of suicide among veterans; and (D) high rates of referrals to the veterans' crisis line.

55 (e) The secretary shall establish policies and procedures, including a monitoring
56 component, for the women veterans' network. The policies and procedures shall include the

57 women veterans' network's: (1) operations; (2) database; and (3) outreach and engagement
58 activities to ensure that all required women veterans' network activities in this section are
59 properly conducted and documented.