

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 28, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

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

Dear Secretary Austin and Secretary McDonough:

We write to inform you of the *Jax Act* (S.2014), a bipartisan, bicameral bill which would require the review and correction of military records of female servicemembers who deployed alongside Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Iraq and Afghanistan as members of Cultural Support Teams (CSTs). This legislation, named after [Jaclyn “Jax” Scott](#), an Army Special Operations Warrant Officer and CST member leading the fight to get women combat veterans the recognition and benefits they deserve, would ensure that these veterans’ military records are accurate in order to provide those with service-connected injuries with the critical care and benefits they have earned.

Before women were able to serve in combat arms, CSTs from all branches of the military embedded with SOF to engage with female populations, filling critical gaps and significantly expanding operational and intelligence-collection capabilities. However, in many cases, their military records do not reflect that they served in combat, despite accompanying SOF on raids and sustaining injuries. As a result, these women have been denied the recognition, disability benefits, and care they deserve. These errors occurred due to the following reasons:

- CST members were mostly comprised of Reservists who were attached to SOF, so their Reserve units (who oversaw them administratively) were not with them to document their combat service and combat-related injuries. These parent commands also did not record that the CST member had ever left the forward operating base.
- In addition to insufficient documentation, CST members have struggled to prove that their injuries are service-connected and combat-related since women have only been able to serve in combat arms within the last decade.

Instead of being treated for physical and mental injuries resulting from their deployments, these women have been turned away by the VA, unable to convince a clinician that their injuries, such as post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, and disabling physical trauma, are combat-related.

Approximately 310 women served on CSTs between 2010 and 2021. While the *Jax Act* would require their military records to be reviewed and corrected, not all of these women sustained injuries during their deployments and are owed benefits. Remedying the oversight of this small population of women will not require changing existing policy, but rather, implementing the

policy that should have always applied to CST members, so that those with service-connected injuries can receive the care and benefits they deserve.

Due to these administrative oversights, we call upon you to remedy these errors so our nation may properly recognize and care for our female combat veterans. While we have introduced this important legislation in the Senate, we implore you to review the personnel records and denied disability claims of these women, and act on your findings so that they may be properly recognized and compensated for their service.

We are committed to ensuring that all servicemembers and veterans have accurate military service records and receive the care and benefits they have earned. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and urge you to rectify this issue by your own authority.

Sincerely,



JACKY ROSEN
United States Senator



JONI ERNST
United States Senator



TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senator



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator



MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator