

THOMAS H. ALLEN  
1ST DISTRICT OF MAINE

1127 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-6116

57 EXCHANGE STREET, SUITE 302  
PORTLAND, ME 04101  
(207) 774-5019

209 MAIN STREET, SUITE 103  
SACO, ME 04072  
(207) 283-8054

www.tomallen.house.gov



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-1901

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August 22, 2008

The Hon. James B. Peake  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Peake:

I write to urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to authorize the hiring of additional full time Military Sexual Trauma (MST) counselors for Maine's Vet Centers in order to meet the unmet needs of veterans in this State.

Although there are five Vet Centers in Maine, the VA has authorized only one full time employee to provide MST services in the State. This counselor is assigned to the Sanford and Portland Vet Centers, where she carries a full caseload. In addition, the Team Leaders at these two Vet Centers and a counselor at the Caribou Vet Center are each qualified under the less intensive requirements of STEP (Staff, Training, and Experience Profile) to provide MST counseling. However, these employees are already fully occupied with their combat veteran cases.

Maine has a veteran population of about 160,000 men and women (more than 10 percent of the state's total population) who are spread out over a geographically large, rural state. As a result, veterans often must travel hundreds of miles to obtain care at VA clinics or Vet Centers. With a full time equivalent (FTE) MST counselor available at only two Vet Centers in the entire State, both of which are in the more populous southern part of Maine, victims of MST are particularly handicapped in obtaining care.

The Military Sexual Trauma Screening Report for Fiscal Year 2007, conducted by the VA's Office of Mental Health Services, surveyed VA facilities nationwide on the rates of MST that are revealed during screenings of male and female veterans. This study found that at the VA hospital at Togus nearly 30 percent of women patients surveyed, 432 individuals, reported exposure to MST. For male veterans, the rate was significantly smaller at 2.1 percent, and yet this figure represents 638 individuals. Shocking as these figures are, the true numbers are undoubtedly greater, since, for a variety of reasons, these types of experiences are often underreported. Most of these victims are not receiving care at Vet Centers.

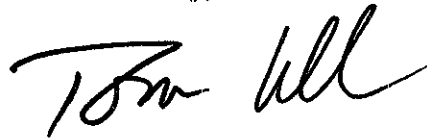
The trauma that results from sexual harassment of a threatening nature, sexual assault, rape, and other acts of violence can have lifelong implications. Incidents that occur while the victim is serving in the military can be especially devastating as they can take place while an

individual is performing their job, often overseas, and within the context of military hierarchies and culture of loyalty. Because the trauma is service related, moreover, providing specialized care is necessary. Effective MST counseling demands training and expertise that must include an understanding of the military culture. Accordingly, private contract services are usually inadequate for MST patients.

I therefore urge you to authorize a sufficient number of FTE MST counselors to serve the needs of all veterans requiring services for MST in Maine. I am sure you will agree that it is our duty to provide the best health care to our nation's veterans, care which they have earned and deserve.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my veterans' specialist, Jim Pineau, in my Portland office. I look forward to working with you to address this problem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Allen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" being more prominent than the last name "Allen".

Tom Allen  
Member of Congress

THA:jc

cc: Alfonso Batres, Ph.D., Chief, Office of Readjustment Counseling Services