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Minority Veterans of America: Effectively Supporting Our Nation's Veterans Will Require Social and Structural Change

[Washington D.C. – July 23, 2020] Minority Veterans of America (MVA) Executive Director Lindsay Church testified at the U.S. House of Representatives' Veterans Affairs Committee Open Legislative Hearing on July 23, 2020, praising the Committee's increased attention to the role that intersectionality plays in the veteran community while cautioning that effectively supporting our nation's minority veterans begins with recognition that the heart of the problem is inextricably bound to social and structural forces, and will require social and structural change to equitably serve all veterans.

MVA endorsed the Committee's efforts to identify and address negative impacts suffered by veterans due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Church testified in favor of HR 4281, Access to Contraception Expansion for Veterans Act, and the endeavor to expand available contraceptive care and provide a full year's supply of medications to veterans in the VA healthcare system, citing that expansion of coverage to provide longer supplies of contraceptives empowers veterans to make planned decisions in their reproductive health.

In addition, Church expressed unequivocal support for HR 3010, the Honoring All Veterans Act, proposal to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs mission statement to more inclusive verbiage: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those 'who shall have borne the battle' and for their families, caregivers, and survivors." It was noted that the motto, while originating in 1865, was not adopted by the Department of Veteran's Affairs until 1959 - well after women were in military service.

"Earlier this week I had the opportunity to join with several members of this Committee at a press conference as we called for a Congressional investigation into the murder of Army Specialist Vanessa Guillén. We are grateful for this support and encourage more members of this committee, and Congress, to hear Vanessa's family's pleas and join the fight for justice," **said Lindsay Church, a Navy veteran and MVA Executive Director.** "By the VA's current motto, none of these powerful women and gender diverse veterans are even worth mentioning. Our community, instead, is asked to get creative and understand that saying 'all men' really does include everyone. The VA's motto, in its current form, has excluded millions of women and gender diverse veterans, past and present, and will continue to exclude future generations until it's changed."

On Tuesday, July 21, 2020, MVA hosted Justicia for Vanessa, DC Day of Action organized through a grassroots effort by women veterans, service women, and organizational supporters. They were joined by several members of the House Veteran's Affairs Committee for a press conference demanding justice for the murder of Army Specialist Vanessa Guillén and systemic change for survivors of military sexual trauma. At the conclusion of the press conference, MVA Executive Director Church delivered a letter to Congress signed by over 4,000 women veterans and servicemembers highlighting the systemic failures of the military regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Minority Veterans of America works to create belonging and advance equity and justice for the minority veteran community. The organization represents millions of veterans—including women, veterans of

color, members of the LGBTQ community, and religious and non-religious minorities—and directly serves thousands of veteran-members across 46 states, 2 territories, and 3 countries.

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Minority Veterans of America (MVA) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that was designed to create belonging and advance equity for underrepresented veterans, including women, people of color, LGBTQ, and religious minorities. The organization aims to transform the narrative of the American veteran by building an interconnected community, fostering greater understanding of our memberships' identities, and serving minority veterans through the development of targeted programming and advocacy. For more information, visit www.MinorityVets.org.