

Legislation for Incarcerated Female Service Members and Veterans

Incarceration poses unique challenges for female service members and veterans. The intersection of military service, gender, and the criminal justice system often leaves these women vulnerable to various issues. Therefore, understanding and addressing their needs through legislation is crucial.

The "Female Veteran Suicide Prevention Act" is one such piece of legislation. While not directly related to incarceration, this Act recognizes the higher rates of mental health issues among female veterans¹. Many of these issues, such as PTSD, can contribute to criminal behavior and incarceration. By improving access to mental health services, this Act indirectly helps reduce the likelihood of incarceration.

The "Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018" provides an alternative to incarceration for veterans who commit non-violent crimes due to mental health issues or substance abuse². This Act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to hire additional Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists to ensure veterans have greater access to VA services when interacting with the judicial system.

The "Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2019" or "Ban the Box" law is also significant³. This federal law prohibits federal agencies and contractors from asking about a job applicant's criminal history until after a conditional offer of employment is made. This law can help formerly incarcerated female veterans secure employment, a crucial factor in reducing recidivism.

The "Second Chance Act" supports state and local reentry programs to reduce recidivism⁴. While not veteran-specific, the Act benefits all individuals returning from prison, including female veterans. It provides funding for employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victims support, and other services that can help reintegrate former inmates into society.

The "First Step Act" is another critical piece of legislation⁵. This law aims to reform the federal prison system and reduce recidivism through various programs. While not veteran-specific, female federal criminal justice system veterans can benefit from these reforms.

While these laws are steps in the right direction, it's crucial to continue advocating for legislation that supports the unique needs of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated female veterans. They have served our country with courage and honor; it's only fitting that we serve them in return.

Footnotes

1. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/248> ↵
2. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2147> ↵

3. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1076> ↵
4. <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/second-chance-act/overview> ↵
5. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/756> ↵



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