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The United States Needs Our Service Women in Combat Arms: Congress Should Support the WARRIOR Act

For the past ten years, all ground combat roles have been open to women who can meet the same rigorous gender-neutral occupational standards as men. More than [5,000 women](#) currently serve in ground combat roles ranging from infantry, armor and artillery to Rangers and special operations.¹ Our national security and military readiness depend on these women who sacrifice and serve bravely alongside their male counterparts. Congress should support the WARRIOR Act, which takes steps to ensure that qualified women can continue to serve in all areas of the military, including in ground combat roles.

Despite the valuable role of service women in our military, the ability of women to continue to serve in ground combat is under threat. Secretary of Defense Hegseth has questioned women's effectiveness and capabilities for ground combat roles, falsely insinuating that women are weak and cannot meet the same requirements as men. Service women already successfully meet the same gender-neutral occupational standards as men, including in ground combat arms. Sec. Hegseth's bias against women in ground combat is also demonstrated in his [call](#) for fitness tests that reflects the "highest male" standard, rather than one that is gender-neutral and focuses on the realities of the occupation.² In December 2025, Sec. Hegseth called for yet another study to examine the operational effectiveness of integrated ground combat units in the Army and Marine Corps, despite a decade of success and multiple evaluations finding no concerns. Given the broader context and reassignment of the study, there is concern that these assessments are laying the groundwork to target the role of women in ground combat specialties and assignments.

There is no valid evidence demonstrating that women are unable to perform effectively in ground combat roles. That issue has been reviewed repeatedly and multiple reputable [studies](#) have shown that there is no evidence of any degradation to unit readiness or effectiveness due to the presence of women.³ Indeed, during recent congressional hearings, when top enlisted leaders across the military were asked, they [agreed](#) that they had no concerns about women serving in ground combat roles.⁴

In order to strengthen military readiness and ensure that qualified women can continue to serve in all areas of the military, including in ground combat roles, Congress must act. On March 27, 2026, Rep. Houlihan (PA-06), an Air Force veteran, and Rep. Goodlander (NH-01), a Navy Reserve veteran, [introduced H.R. 8175](#), the Women Add Resourcefulness and Resilience to Improve Operational Readiness (WARRIOR) Act in the House of Representatives, along with 33 original cosponsors. On July 30, 2026, Sen. Hirono (D-HI) and Sen.

¹ Women in the Service Coalition, Inc. "Women Are Crucial to Maintaining a Strong US Military Force," February 2026, [bfd496_3c348178169e44c583ffeca9df178e87.pdf](#).

² Transcript, "Secretary of War Pete Hegseth Addresses General and Flag Officers at Quantico, Virginia," Sept. 30, 2025, [Secretary of War Pete Hegseth Addresses General and Flag Officers at Quantico, Virginia > U.S. Department of War > Transcript | U.S. Department of War](#); see also Starre Vartan, "4 ways women are physically stronger than men," updated June 11, 2025, Washington Post, [When it comes to strength, women do some things better than men - The Washington Post](#).

³ See, e.g. Kris Fuhr, Women in the Service Coalition, "Assessment of DOD Tasker to "Review" Women in Combat Arms," [DOD Review of Women in Combat Arms | Wisci](#).

⁴ See Patty Nieberg, "Top enlisted leaders say they see no issue with women in combat arms meeting standards," Task & Purpose, Feb. 12, 2026, [Top enlisted leaders say women can meet combat arms standards](#).

Duckworth (D-IL), along with 18 original cosponsors, [introduced companion legislation, S. 5189](#) in the Senate.

The WARRIOR Act affirms the critical role that women play in our armed forces by ensuring that qualified women can continue to serve in all military occupational specialties and assignments. By focusing on merit and qualifications that are key to success in combat, the WARRIOR Act will help ensure the strongest possible military for our nation. We urge Members to co-sponsor the WARRIOR Act.

The WARRIOR Act (H.R. 8175/ S. 5189)

- **Prohibits exclusions from military occupational specialties, career fields, or assignments because of gender.** In so doing, the bill reinforces that each individual should be judged on merit and ability, not gender-based stereotypes. The bill maintains the existing statutory language prohibiting goals, quotas or ceilings based on gender.
- **Reaffirms and modernizes what the law currently requires: gender-neutral occupational performance standards** that women in combat must already meet. The bill updates existing law to reflect that all occupations are already open to both men and women. The bill also adds protections to guard against the manipulation of physical fitness requirements to exclude women, as described below.
- **Recognizes that in addition to physical abilities, tactical, cognitive and technical abilities are critical elements for mission success.** This language is intended to counter the singular focus on physical strength as a requirement for combat despite the importance of a variety of skills and abilities for success in combat roles. The bill also requires that specific standards be based on a scientifically rigorous process.
- **Puts in place a number of important guardrails:**
 - Strengthens congressional oversight by requiring
 - Reports to congressional defense committees of any proposed changes to physical occupational standards that will result in a decrease or increase of more than 10% of service members by gender. Such changes may not be implemented until a 180-day congressional review period has passed.
 - Annual reports to congressional armed services committees of any changes to occupational standards, with an explanation of how such changes meet regular, recurring, actual duties of job and the number of members involuntarily separated or misclassified, disaggregated by gender and occupational specialty.
 - The Department of Defense to submit the assessment of integrated ground combat units to Congress with Comptroller General Review to follow [Note: the House and Senate bills reflect the change in status of the review at the time of their respective introductions, from the Institute for Defense Analyses to John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory].
 - **Ensures adequate time for service members to meet new or revised physical requirements for a military career designator** with a minimum of 18 months in consultation with health experts.

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