

February 18, 2020

Senate Bill 904 - Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans - Establishment - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and members of the committee:

For the record, I am Brooke Milewski, a military spouse. I am here to testify on behalf of SB904. Mental health and PTSD are real issues, but society still often looks down on you if you suffer from one or more of these health conditions. Unfortunately, for the military community this is all too common. It is something that soldiers, spouses, and children deal with on a daily basis. It affects the whole family, not just the person dealing with PTSD or mental illness.

My husband is a Marine veteran who was deployed two times to Iraq. He saw the worst of the worst, saw his friends, his brothers, his soldiers die in front of him, sometimes while holding them in his arms. He never thought he would make it home alive, let alone to have a family.

Gratefully, he did come home, but we were faced with challenges. When he came home he tried to have the mentality that everything he saw and had to do was a "job" and he could put it all in the back of his mind and move on. As many of us know, that can only last for so long. On top of coming back from war he had to settle back into society and in a world that was quite different from what he had known for two plus years.

Not only did the reality come head-on that he had PTSD, but when he retired from the Marines he felt a sense of loss over what would be his next steps. We realized that it was critical for him to receive therapy along with myself so that we could move forward together. I saw the changes in him, the fear someone was following us, the being on edge, always looking around when we were out as if we were going to get attacked, the list goes on.

I knew for us to be successful, therapy was necessary. Through the process of looking for therapist we found that many did not take Tricare, if they did take Tricare they were not qualified for what we needed, and the best of the best started to decline Tricare because the payment rates were so low. It was hard for my husband to open up, and when we finally found a therapist who he felt comfortable with, they had to start charging us a private rate as well, because Tricare was only offering them \$25.00 per session. We could not afford the cost of \$100.00 plus dollars on a weekly occasion.

Due to the high costs of therapy and the ongoing inconveniences of accessing it, we eventually stopped treatment. I saw great improvement in my husband during therapy, but the cost was putting more stress on us than actually helping.

A dream we both had was to have a family, we were beyond thrilled to find out we were expecting a baby, but never could have imagined the challenges that would come our way. My pregnancy was beyond complicated and scary at times, I was sick the

whole 9 months and was put on bed rest. Bed rest did not work and I was rushed to the hospital to be induced.

The delivery was nothing that what we could have planned for. Long and short, I nearly died on June 3rd, 2016. The delivery looked like a war scene and that brought back my husband to his days in Iraq, I knew I was dying.....I knew what was going on around me was not normal, I saw the scare in everyone's faces, I took what I thought was one last look at my daughter, I woke hours later.....

I am beyond grateful & blessed to be here today, but it does not come with challenges. I was put on disability for 6 months while I recovered (this meant my parents moving in with us, medical care, caregivers etc.), my husband had to deal with everything he saw and went through during my pregnancy and delivery that brought back so many awful and scary memories.

I was diagnosed with PTSD because of my pregnancy and delivery. I also suffered flashbacks, night terrors, severe anxiety, fear, you name it. I got a glimpse into what my husband and other soldiers have and are dealing with for years.

I realized we need to end the stigma of mental health, the negativity around PTSD. There needs to be more clinics at no cost that have therapists qualified to treat the military family, and there needs to be more telehealth for those that can't leave the house.

PTSD is very real; it can debilitate to you to the core. People don't often understand the true impact it has on a person until they live it day-by-day. I am beyond grateful that my husband and myself have a clinic that we can go to at no charge, that is close by, and for days my husband feels more comfortable he has the option for telehealth. Knowing that I can receive therapy as an individual and with my husband has been a gift.

When we go to our therapy appointments, we are not thinking how much this is going to cost us out of pocket & what are we going to have to eliminate to afford this, we can really focus on getting better and our mental health.

Therapy that is convenient, at no cost or reduced cost with qualified therapist and offering telehealth has been a blessing to our family. We can focus on our beautiful daughter and the joys of having a family all while healing and getting healthy mentally. Without these services, my family would not be where we are today.

I can only help that this testimony will help provide better therapy and health services for our military, veterans, and their families. I urge a favorable report on SB904.

Sincerely,

Brooke Milewski