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Subject: Public Comment 6/30
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Hello,

I was saying hello during the call and was not heard and public comment was closed while i was waiting. please accept my written comment,

Distinguished Council Members, thank you for inviting me to speak with you all on this important amendment. My name is Melissa Margain, and I am fortunate to serve as the Seattle Program Director with Minority Veterans of America. As a U.S Army Disabled Combat Veteran, I am fortunate to come before you today in both my professional and personal capacity. I am speaking today to provide additional context, from a minority veteran's perspective, of the ramifications the proposed changes in language to Section 840 of the King County Charter, through ordinance 2020-0207. As it stands now, the proposed amendment would add military and veteran status as a protected class for employment and contracts. While this movement is necessary for the continued protection against unwarranted discrimination, it discounts a significant portion of our veteran community—arguably the portion that needs these protections the most.

Veterans that identify as black, indigenous, or of color; veterans that are experiencing homelessness; and veterans that are living with PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, or the effects of sexual trauma represent a demographic that had a higher propensity of engaging in self-help treatments while in service. Those self-help treatments were often necessitated by a lack of comprehensive care from their in-service units and were more often than not grounded in self-destructive habits. Rather than finding the solace they sought in those self-help efforts, many of them were gifted with general, other than honorable, and even bad conduct discharges. As I'm sure we can all agree, no veteran should ever be forced to take a wrongfully characterized discharge when searching for due and necessary care in instances where our government failed to provide it. We are fortunate to have relationships with several attorneys and nonprofit organizations that are working with interested veterans to correct these erroneous discharges. However, those appeals processes can take several years and until the discharge paperwork is rectified veterans with unfavorable discharge characterizations are encumbered from living their lives to their fullest potential, especially in instances that involve employment contracts.

In 2018, it was reported that 2,580 veterans received an other than honorable discharge. More than 70% of those veterans received behavioral health treatment at the time of their discharge and 60% of that group left the service with a diagnosed disorder and no rectification to the adverse discharge characterization.

A 2017 study reported that Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been called a “signature injury” of Iraq and Afghanistan Conflicts. The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC) report nearly 350,000 incident diagnoses of TBI in the U.S. military since 2000.

An estimated 1 in 4 female veterans and 1 in 100 male veterans in the VA healthcare system have self-reported instances of experiencing military sexual trauma. It is important to note that by percentage women are at greater risk of experiencing MST, but nearly 40% of veterans who have self-disclosed MST experiences to the VA are men. I also want to highlight here that I specified these are self-reported incidences. I say that because these are only the folks that have been brave enough to come forward and speak about their experiences. There are arguably just as many, maybe even more, veterans that are sitting on the sidelines in silence because they are worried about the ramifications and retaliations they may be subjected to after speaking out. Those veterans often engaged in self-treatment tendencies and found themselves walking out of a broken system, a system that failed them, with unfavorable marks that would have lasting repercussions on their livelihood for the rest of their lives.

According to the 2019 Count us In report 830 individuals identified as veterans. On the night of the count, over half (56%) of veterans were unsheltered and 44% were sheltered. Approximately 19% of veterans were experiencing chronic homelessness

In a county with over 102,000 Veterans it is highly probable that this language will directly discriminate against some of our community's most vulnerable veteran populations. King County has been a leader within the veteran service and support community for many years and has built a platform in which our veterans know that we are able and willing to defend and advocate on their behalves. A slight modification to this proposed language, ensuring it is equitably inclusive, will not only help to further our leadership in this space, but will signal to the larger veterans service community that we acknowledge we failed these veterans, and now is the time to make reparations.

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