

My name is Catherine Kooyers. I have been an advocate for veterans since the late 1960s.

The point I hope to make today is that veterans and communities have fought for improved services for veterans and patients for decades. We are seeing a resurgence in issues that should be nonissues by now. We need to work together to stop this surge and provide the help veterans and patients need and deserve once and for all. Time is our enemy and we are losing too many lives. We need to act quickly and responsibly.

Yesterday, I was honored to be part of the Work Group in Lansing sponsored by Senator Warren. I was impressed by the talent and dedication in that room -- it appeared sincere and intense. At the same time, I was also conflicted by how far we still have to go. And that over 40 years later, some of the same questions are resurfacing. Why? So, I am here today to offer any help I can on the issues at hand.

I did email to Sen. Warren today a list of observations and suggestions and encourage you to consider them. *For instance, why are veterans from the G.R.Home for Vets being pushed in the Pine Rest system? Do we need more in-house mental help services? Why has the fourth floor of that facility not been remodeled and opened to provide more housing and help for more veterans? What is the delay? What can the State do to expedite that? Why did it take one year to get a board certified licensed psychologist after the other left and a need was identified?*

I come from a family of veterans, including uncles who served in WWII and cousins who served in Korea and Nam. When my grandmother died, we found a purple heart medal in a box that no one had ever spoken of. My father was a WWII veteran stationed in Germany in 1945. So, I do know what it is like to grow up in the home of a torn war veteran. The land that Davenport University and Farmers Insurance now sit on belonged to my grandfather. On that land was lake on which my father and I spent many hours fishing and talking. He shared with me many WWII stories and talked to me about values and helping others. How conflicted service left one.

Then, as a 1969 graduate, during what some call the peak of the Vietnam Conflict, my generation was largely affected by veteran and political issues. Most of us roller skated in those days. One day a boy would be there, then we would not see him ever again after he went to war. Others came home different people. Kent County had one of the largest veteran populations in the country yet today Michigan gets low national marks for underserving its veterans.

When I was 16, the boy across the street was killed in Nam around Thanksgiving. It was reported 13 died during that event and dozens were wounded before help came. I recall seeing that day a side of my father I never knew existed. He starting screaming and smashing things. I recall taking my siblings outside to hide from the episode, which I had learned would pass. If that was not devastating enough, my neighbor's brother was in my homeroom and I could see firsthand the impact

all this had on him also. The point being, what happens to one, impacts many. And I still question why we don't have more and better programs for children of veterans.

Then, while living in Ohio in the 70s, I met a P.O.W. who was told he had to wait for six months to get treatment for P.O.W. related injuries. Since that day, my life has been firmly dedicated to finding better help for our veterans. I helped the Ohio vets organize the Vietnam Veterans Council, which eventually became Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 35. Some of the members were on the first national VVA boards. Frustrated with "the system," they began programs to help themselves get well and move forward.

So, in the early 80s, I Co-Chaired the original national Vietnam Veterans of America P.T.S.D. Awareness Committee. Besides a couple psychologists and the V.A. which were most helpful, there was next to nothing. V.A. told us it was a rare disorder and it was highly unlikely more than 2,000 people in the world had it. We know differently now. We then ran ads asking for info only to get requests back to share what we found. So we wrote the brochure and program which took that term from the mental health and V.A. communities to the veterans across the country. Then, one day I realized this was more than shell shock, that it applied to victims of other unnatural events. So, we worked with American Red Cross and groups across the country to create an awareness and treat a previously unrecognized class of victims of rape, natural disasters, fire, and more. Even in the age before computers, that movement took on an amazing life of its own. As a result of the ongoing work of countless groups and individuals, today immediate awareness and help are available to victims and during crises like 9/11 and Sandy Hook. However, much remains to be done.

In summary, it took decades to form groups, committees and coalitions which have worked on pretty much every issue impacting veterans from WWII atomic veterans with radiation issues, to Namvets, to burn pits, to TBI to today's hearing. But, much still remains to be done.

In closing, thank you for listening to us tonight. Please remember though, time is our enemy and we are losing too many lives. We need to act quickly and responsibly. Thank you!

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