

From: [Jones, Barbara](#)
To: [Amy Ziering](#)
Cc: [Ham, Patricia, COL, DoD GC](#)
Subject: Re: Politico - Survivors on Reporting
Date: Sunday, July 21, 2013 11:22:13 AM

Dear Amy,

It was a pleasure to meet with you last Thursday and to hear your views. When you left I promised to send you a reminder to send me the OpEd pieces by two former commanders in support of removing the commanders from their roles under the UCMJ in the handling of sexual assaults and other serious crimes.

Sorry to be late in sending this along. I am very interested on getting these views and of course in receiving any additional information that will help the Panel in its work.

Thank you,
Barbara

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 19, 2013, at 11:09 PM, "Amy Ziering" [REDACTED] wrote:

Sexual assault victims blast DoD, VA treatment

By Juana Summers

7/19/13 4:31 PM EDT

Four victims of military sexual assault condemned the Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs on Friday over the treatment they'd received both soon after and long since their attacks.

Three women and one man told the House Veterans Affairs Committee in raw, emotional terms about their experiences confronting their assailants and what they described as inadequate care and support over the subsequent years.

"When you report a rape, you become public enemy No. 1," said Victoria Sanders, 58, an Army veteran who said she was raped at age 20 while stationed at Fort Carson, Colo. "Even if your rapist is punished, harassment is limitless. It followed me through three transfers in nine months."

Sanders said that while her rapist was reprimanded — receiving a reduction in rank, lost pay, and confinement to barracks — he still remained on duty.

"This is an example of chain of command harassment because the barracks he was confined to is the one where he worked," she told lawmakers. "I still worked in the office next door."

Lisa Wilkins, an Air Force veteran, told lawmakers that she and other service members who were sexually assaulted were "rape survivors of friendly fire."

"I use those terms not to make a joke of it, but to bring it home that we were all assaulted by someone who wore the [same] uniform as we wore, and not all people wear the uniform as honorably as you do," she said.

Department of Veterans Affairs officials who testified before the committee Friday on a separate panel said they want to do more to provide for veterans who were victims of sexual trauma, agreeing that the department has fallen short.

"There are significant gaps that we need to address," Dr. Rajiv Jain, a VA assistant deputy undersecretary for patient care services, told lawmakers.

While each veteran told grisly stories about the retaliation and mistreatment he or she faced after coming forward, they also complained of lackluster medical care, saying that providers routinely dismissed their concerns.

Tara Johnson, 40, a Marine Corps veteran, said she experienced sexual trauma in the military repeatedly — including at the hands of a senior officer while an officer candidate — before reporting what had happened to her command. Her experiences with VA facilities have scarred her so deeply, she said, that she refuses to return.

"I was assigned a male provider who was new to the VA. During my first appointment through tears and fear I again disclosed my experience with MST," Johnson said of a 2012 visit to a VA facility. "The provider looked at me, widened his eyes, sat back in his chair and said, 'Well, do you really think you were raped?'"

"I now pay out of pocket for all of my therapy," she said.

Other complaints about the quality of care included victims' inability to see one consistent provider, instead of being shuffled between a number of different doctors and therapists.

"When I first entered the system there was a fantastic clinic and they treated us very well. They went out of their way to get the treatment we needed," Sanders said. "That was dismantled and we were left with scraps."

VA officials who testified during Friday's hearing on a separate panel vowed to look into the service gaps illustrated by the victims' testimony and to report back to Congress.

While the faces of the fight to crack down on the sexual assault epidemic within the military's ranks have been largely women, the victims are overwhelmingly men. The Pentagon's latest report on sexual assault estimated that as many as 26,000 service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2012, up from 19,000 the year prior.

The Pentagon estimated that more than half of those victims were men, and largely the victims of other men.

"It's been my experience that the Veterans Health Administration discriminates against male survivors of military sexual trauma solely because of their gender," said Brian Lewis, who said he was raped by a superior officer while serving in the Navy. "Male survivors are the equals of female survivors and need to be treated as such by the Veterans Health Administration," he said.

Earlier this week, a proposal by New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democrat, gained momentum as two prominent Republican senators endorsed her proposal to take the decision about whether to pursue sexual assault cases away from a victim's commander and give it instead to independent military prosecutors.

Republican Sens. Ted Cruz and Rand Paul signed onto the proposal, which is opposed by many Republicans and some Democrats, including Michigan Sen. Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Several of the victims testifying at Friday's hearing also faulted the command structure within the military's ranks, calling it revictimizing.

"It's almost as if your chain of command sets out to do some kind of emotional blackmail on you or emotional trauma, and that's something that a rape survivor can't handle at that time," Wilkins said, describing the repercussions of reporting her assault and seeking treatment. "You're in a closed society. Most people don't realize how much the VA treatment facilities mirror our military treatment facilities."

California Rep. Jackie Speier, who unsuccessfully pushed legislation similar to Gillibrand's as the House debated the 2014 defense policy bill, asked the witnesses whether they'd support removing cases from units' chains of command.

"This is really important because this makes the case that if we keep it in the chain of command the likelihood of any victim getting the fair evaluation is just not going to happen," Speier said.

All four victims agreed, raising their hands. Two, Wilkins and Lewis, raised both their hands.

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