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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

September 20, 2013

Barbara Jones
Chair, Response Systems Panel
875 N. Randolph St.
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Madam Chairman,

Thank you for your letter inviting me to share information with the Response Systems Panel to consider as it addresses the requirements of Section 576 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013. The work that you and the other members of the panel are doing is extremely important in the fight against sexual assault in the military. As you know, this is a subject I am extremely passionate about. I truly believe that this epidemic is corrosive and damaging to good order and discipline and is undermining the creditability of the greatest military force in the world.

I am pleased to see that you are choosing to examine the role of the commander in the military justice process. It is important to consider each aspect of the commander's role, including his or her influence on the reporting process. I think we share grave concerns about the fact that of the estimated 26,000 unwanted sexual contacts that occur each year only 3,374 are reported. We need to find a way to eliminate this gap.

I have listened to many victims and spoken with them about their assaults. The one thing I hear over and over again is that victims have no faith in the chain of command on this issue. Victims do not believe they will receive justice because commanders lack the training and understanding for dealing with this specific type of crime. That is why I respectfully ask that you consider examining in this session on the role of the commander, not only the commander's responsibilities, but also how a commander can hinder reporting, investigations and achieving justice for crimes committed by their subordinates.

To make this session more meaningful and ensure that you look at the role of the commander comprehensively, I would highly encourage you to include retired or prior service commanders who might be able to speak more freely, subordinates who can share their perspective on the role of commanders, and victims who can speak about their experience with commanders in the role of convening authority.

I am also attaching some survivors' stories as additional information for the panel. I believe it is critical that their voices be heard. These are all survivors who are willing to speak publicly about their experiences, should you want to speak with them further.

Please feel free to contact me or a member of my staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Kirsten E. Gillibrand
U.S. Senator