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Testimony by BriGette McCoy Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 13, 2013

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Testimony from Veteran and Sexual Assault Victim, BriGette McCoy for United States Senate Committee on Armed Services Hearing on Sexual Assaults in the Military

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Thank you. I have deep gratitude towards those who have worked tirelessly for our voices to be heard and to those here listening with compassionate and open hearts poised to make positive changes toward these matters at hand.

I am a Gulf War era service connected disabled veteran.

I was raped during military service and during my assignment at my first and only duty station. This was 1988 and I was 18 and in country less than 90 days. I did not report it. That would not be the last time I would be assaulted or harassed.

This is my story but its not mine alone more than 19000 annually share similarities in their story too.

In 1991 I reported sexual harassment. I was to the point of mental and emotional fatigue. When I reported to my command in a formal written complaint with help from one of the women NCO's in my unit, I was told I misunderstood the offending NCO's intentions and was asked "what do you want"- I only wanted a an apology and to be removed from working directly with him. No one ever officially explained any further process like pressing charges or moving forward with my formal written complaint. It was never spoken about again. They did remove me from his team and his formal apology consisted of him driving by me on base and saying "sorry" out of his open car door window.

Afterwards, I was verbally and socially harassed, put on extra duties that conflicted with my medical profiles, and socially isolated. After major verbal and physical conflicts with my First Sergeant I was given a "choice" to either get out, by breaking my extension, to maintain my honorable discharge or continue to stay in and face UCMJ action. By this point the atmosphere in my unit and on post was so hostile I was in fear for my life so I signed the papers. Within the week I had orders out of Germany and I was escorted by two NCO's to my plane in Frankfurt Germany. That was it! Within a few days my military career was over.

Please note that In that unit I had not been the only service member sexually harassed I had been told directly by other women soldiers who were afraid to come forward.

Returning to the US and civilian life was difficult I had a lot of false starts, I had a lot of negative behaviors that carried over from the military. I was anxious and overly protective. I became suicidal and had suicidal attempts. I went through severe depression and had multiple severe medical illnesses and was unable to carry on the rigors of work for which I was highly trained for. I repeatedly moved from place to place was homeless and medically disabled but not even the VA would recognize this and help me till some two decades later.

I lost many material things and emotional relationships in my lifetime and struggle with my faith. I grieve because I feel I was the lucky one. I left my unit alive, with an honorable discharge, although discombobulated and scared for my life and my future. Many leave with less than honorable discharges and personality disorders on their records further hindering them from applying for medical treatment and medical claims. Some like Pfc LaVena Johnson don't make it home to their parents alive.

22 years later almost to the day of my early ETS I was awarded veterans service compensation and service connection for MST. Why did it take so long? Why did I have to go through so much before anyone would listen? Why did I have to be violated again through the process?

Today I am a volunteer for veteran therapeutic arts programs. I participate in listening sessions to help organizations better understand the many facets of women veterans needs for their programmatic purposes. My story is chronicled with other women veterans in the documentary Service When Women come marching Home. I am a social media peer supporter and advocate. I collaborate with dozens of organizations working to resolve issues for veterans. Suicide and homelessness are two huge issues in the MST community with claims denial and lack of purposeful medical treatment exacerbating those issues. PTSD from MST is the main contributing factor with regard to women veteran community issues.

I have to say I no longer have any hope that the military chain of command will consistently, prosecute, convict, sentence and carry out the sentencing of sexual predators in uniform without absconding justice somehow. Only 8% are prosecuted...of that 8% how many are relieved of their duties their pensions their careers? How many of them are placed on national registry as sex offenders before they are returned to civilian life. What happens to the 92%?

Lets not allow sexual predators, in uniform, the opportunity to become highly trained highly degreed military decorated sexual predators. Lets make sure they are convicted and dishonorably discharged and listed on the national registry. Lets do this before they go unnoticed into our communities to further harm our service members our community and family members.

Sexual assault and trauma has deep and broad roots in the military lets not just pluck a few leaves and trim a branch lets deal with this from the roots.

#makeitstop

Thank you.

BriGette McCoy

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