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Ex-Army specialist: I'm still concerned that military won't address rape culture

By Arturo Garcia

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THE RAW STORY



A former Army specialist who shared her story about being raped as an 18-year-old servicewoman before a Senate hearing told MSNBC host Richard Lui on Friday she was “still a little bit concerned” about the culture that protected her attacker being addressed.

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“Going into the testimony, I was not sure if my voice would be heard, if the voices of other men and women who have been sexually assaulted and raped would be heard,” BriGette McCoy said. “Coming out of it, I felt much more confident about my voice being heard, but I’m still a little bit concerned about whether or not we’re gonna move the process out of the chain of command.”

McCoy and three other sexual assault victims shared their stories at [a subcommittee meeting for the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday](#). She testified that she was raped during her first assignment for the Army, two weeks before her 19th birthday, and was also sexually harassed by other officers.

On Friday, she recounted the case, telling Lui that when she finally brought up the harassment to supervisors two years later, they downplayed the problem.

"When I went to them, they basically said I didn't understand his intentions and told me that, you know, that was it," McCoy said. "[They asked] what did I want? What did I want from them? What did I want from him?"

That response, she said, discouraged her from bringing up the rapes.

"I couldn't imagine having a conversation with them to say, 'Oh and by the way, this happened two years ago,'" she said.

[According to former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta](#), about 19,000 men and women in the military are assaulted every year, but only about 3,200 of those incidents are reported. Panetta also said that 56 percent of sexual assault cases in 2010 — more than 10,000 — involved male victims.

Lui mentioned that military commanders currently have the ability to overturn a military court conviction, before asking McCoy, "Why is this being ignored?"

"I think it's being ignored because people are in positions of power and those are the people who are raping," she answered. "And if anyone outs anyone else, then they lose their benefits, they lose their pensions, they lose their right to be in society and move freely. If you convict these people and put them on a national registry, that restricts their behavior, that restricts their ability to move freely and have the finances that they need. So they just don't want to relinquish that level of power."

Panetta's successor, Chuck Hagel, [has ordered a review](#) of sexual assault convictions overturned by high-ranking officers, while Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and John Cornyn (R-TX) [have introduced an amendment](#) to the National Defense Authorization Act barring convicted sex offenders from military service.

McCoy said that since her testimony, people have recognized her and expressed their sympathy over her ordeal, but she reiterated that she is far from alone in having to go through it.

"There are many men and women who are, right now, as we speak, going through this very same thing," she told Lui. "Nothing has changed. All the way back through [the] Vietnam era, we had women and men who have been sexually assaulted, sexually abused and sexually harassed and raped."

Watch McCoy's interview with Lui, aired Friday on MSNBC, below.

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