

## **STATEMENT OF JEN McCLENDON, PROTECT OUR**

### **DEFENDERS Response Systems To Adult Sexual Assault Crimes**

#### **Panel**

My Name is Jen McClendon. I am a teacher and the mother of four happy children. I served in the United States Navy from 1997-2001.

While serving in the Navy I endured daily harassment and exposure to extreme workplace hostility. I experienced grabbing and groping while stationed at Fleet ASW in Point Loma, California. Then while on a ship in Norfolk, VA, I experienced harassment and eventually assault and rape.

The first full-fledged rape took place while I was on a two-person midnight watch (Midwatch) in the Sonar room on The USS Donald Cook (DDG 75). The perpetrator was an E5 while I was an E4. I was one rank below him. This man became so comfortable assaulting and raping me that when a group of eight or ten people was needed to deploy TACTAS (Tactical Towed Array Sonar) he would send other sailors back to their racks after we hauled the equipment back into the ship and he would rape me. The worst part was showing up to work knowing that I was there to be raped.

I tried three times to report those rapes. When I first told my senior chief he told me that I was a feminist, a lesbian, and a Democrat and therefore if I said anything more that I was going to prove that I was just trying to get this perpetrator (Name withheld because he was not convicted) into trouble. I am still shocked at this egregious abuse of power. As a university logic professor I would say that like many arguments that are used against rape victims, the conclusion does not follow the premises.

I was eventually removed from the ship for sleepwalking. I had never walked in my sleep before and I have not since that time. I was sent to a Transient Personnel Unit (TPU) on the Norfolk Naval Base. I was walking in the hallway one day and an IC Chief (Internal Communications Chief) pulled me into his office and asked who I was and why I was there. He told me that he had been watching me since I arrived. I sort of knew that this was happening again but I ignored it and hoped that I could hold him off.

He began to stalk me. He stalked me to my favorite café and to my favorite bookstore all of the time. I began parking behind stores and I bought a new car. I darkened my hair and I began to dress differently. He eventually pushed himself into my car and raped me in broad daylight. He pushed me into my barracks room and raped me on the floor of my barracks room.

I literally tolerated this until I could not take it anymore. I knew how badly rape investigations were handled so I planned only to survive and get out of the military intact. Then this man's wife began to stalk me also. This was when fear got out of control. I had no idea what this man and his wife had planned for me. I thought that they were going to kill me and I still fear them.

Because this man's wife began to harass my command—which by this time was National Ocean Processing Facility Dam Neck, VA- I was brought up on charges of adultery. My communications officer told me that I had better not turn this into another rape allegation

or that he would throw the book at me. I signed the page 13 disciplinary action because by now my goal was only to survive.

After this set of events my Navy therapist told me that the Navy was not a good match for me and he convinced me to accept an "Adjustment Disorder" discharge. I accepted this discharge and got out of the military and began graduate school as soon my first VA claim settled out.

I have significant symptoms of having been traumatized and my life and livelihood have both been damaged but I am also thriving. So many people have suffered to the point of having their lives destroyed. As bad as the rapes were, the investigation, the mental health treatment, being charged with a crime, and being forced out of the military were the worst part of all of this. Having the perpetrators nearly canonized by uniform popular opinion was as bad as the rapes were.

I should not have had to lose my job and I should have had more options. All advocates understand how hard it is to prove rape and sexual assault. What we do not understand is why we were ostracized, treated like criminals, treated like we were severely mentally ill, and we do not understand why we had to lose our jobs.

Why is it that a soldier, sailor, or Air Force member that reports a rape has a target on their back? Why does reporting a rape cost us our jobs, livelihood, and future training options? This is about so much more than harassment or rape. The thinking problems that are taught and driven in the military make rape part of the culture.

I have sat SILENTLY in every hearing in Washington DC since 2011. I have heard members of the SAPRO office and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff say, "I have no idea why rape victims do not come to us on the worst day of their lives." I believe that Air Force General Mark Welch made that comment at the HASC Lackland hearings. I have been sitting here waiting to tell you why. Why have the Joint Chiefs and the SAPRO not asked victims why they do not come forward?

I can tell you intimately why victims do not come forward. You have a better chance at winning the lottery than being treated humanely by a command driven investigation of violent crime in the military. There are built in obstructions to justice and those obstructions are more organized than organized crime or the wheels of justice.

For the sake of brevity I will close here. I live, work, and play inside the Washington DC Beltway. I work three blocks from Capitol Hill. I am available for sustained, productive, and solution oriented conversations on this matter. Please see my contact information below.

Thank you for your time,

Jen McClendon