

Good afternoon Your Honor,

My name is Sara Zak. Thank you for the opportunity to address The Response Systems Panel today. I am a retired Navy Commander and a Graduate student on leave of absence from the University of Southern California School of Social Work. I am an independent, self-supported, concerned citizen who has come to the DC area to learn about the military sexual assault problem and what is being done to fix it. I am not a stakeholder and I am not looking for employment. I am not a victim of sexual assault and I am not an expert in any of the professional fields that are currently addressing this problem. I hope you will agree that my military experience and objectivity increase the potential that there will be some value added by my comments today.

First, I would like to offer my thanks to the Panel for all the work that has been done to find a solution to the military sexual assault problem. I can't imagine all the time and energy that has been dedicated to this assignment by all the members of the Panel and its subcommittees.

Given that the purpose of this Panel is to make recommendations on how to improve the current system, I join with others who are eagerly anticipating the public release of the results of your investigation. Personally, I hope your report will include recommendations for two or three alternatives to the current system of investigation and prosecution and that one of them will give Senators Gillibrand and McCaskill a basis for collaborating on a single bill that will improve the military sexual assault problem, be acceptable to the Department of Defense (DoD) *and* get strong bipartisan support in Congress.

As I stated earlier, I have a perspective of this issue that I believe is unique. In closing I request your permission to offer a couple of personal thoughts.

I agree with those who believe the Commander of the accused should remain part of the prosecution of an alleged sexual assault offender. I also agree with those who believe the Commander of the accused may be too biased to fairly adjudicate cases involving sexual assault. With due respect to sexual assault victims and Senator Gillibrand, removing the Commander of the accused from the process is not the only way to eliminate the perceived bias. As with many things in the military, training may be part of the answer and I know that is being addressed by the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Reporting Office (SAPRO.)

Unfortunately, the statistics used to support military sexual assault prevention and reporting training pose a credibility problem. The inconsistency with which statistics are being kept throughout the DoD is an issue of concern. A lack of understanding about the source and collection of the data also contributes to the general disbelief that military sexual assault is a problem at all. So, although, the DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault Fiscal Year 2012, presents the data as in Figure 1.

I propose that many in this generation of Commanders are so dubious of the statistics that they prefer to hold on to their own perceptions of the problem, which may look more like Figure 2.

After three decades of empty threats of 'zero tolerance' it seems to have taken hours in the Congressional hot seats for the leaders of the military services to finally 'get' that there is a serious sexual assault problem in the military. I hope they are able to overcome challenges such as doubt of the statistics and get the rest of "the troops" on board with the new program in a timely manner.

Again, thank you for the privilege of speaking to you today.

Figure 1

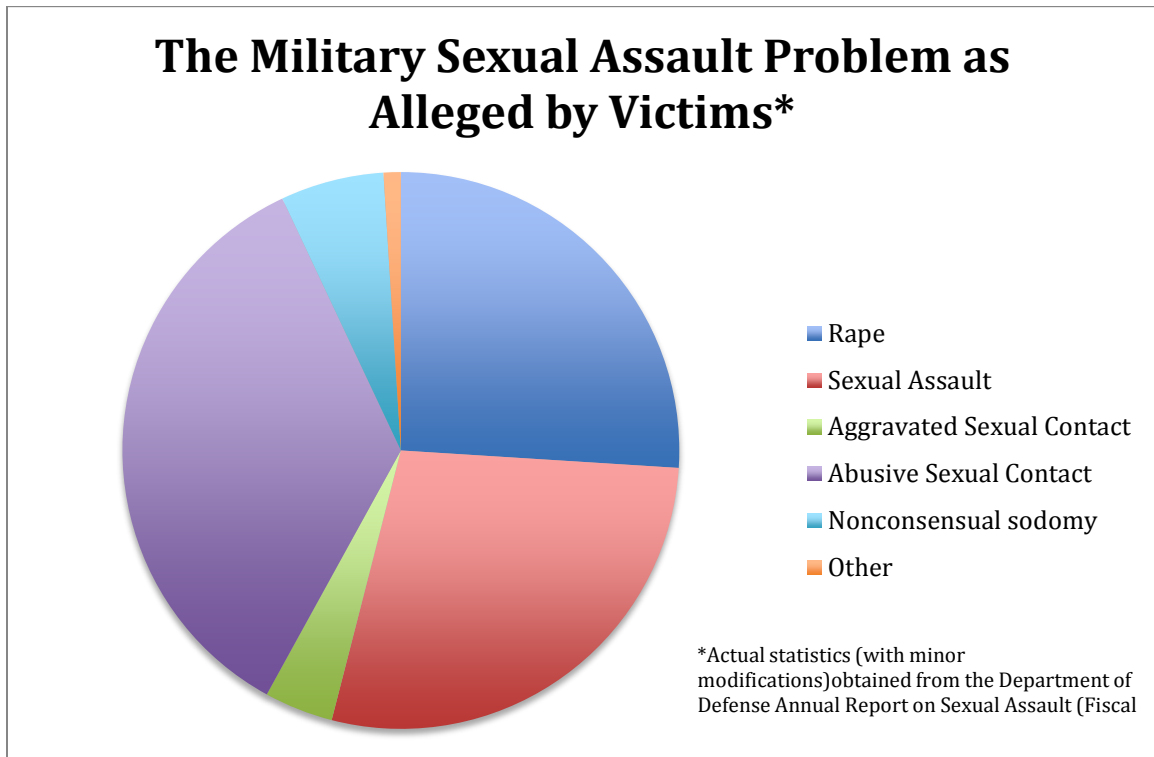


Figure 2

