Members of Congress on Thursday urged the Air Force to stop seeking confidential records kept by a civilian Colorado Springs therapist, saying her private conversations with women cadets and others seeking sexual-assault counseling should be protected.

Lawmakers including Democrat Loretta Sanchez of California and Republican Lindsey Graham of South Carolina are discussing a measure to strengthen the military's shield law protecting therapists' records.

And Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., who has assisted dozens of former cadets who allege their cases were poorly handled by the Air Force Academy, has asked the Air Force to reconsider its move.

"The records that are being subpoenaed are the private property of this therapist, not the property of her patients, nor of the military," Allard said. "Therapists such as Jennifer Bier play an important role in helping sexual-assault victims understand and eventually recover from an attack. Her work has been particularly helpful in assisting Air Force cadets."

Citing personal ethics and Colorado statutes protecting such records, counselor Bier is defying an Air Force subpoena from Texas ordering her to turn over notes of conversations with Jessica Brakey, a former Air Force Academy cadet who has complained of being raped. The counseling happened outside the military base.

Had Brakey been raped off government property, records of her therapy sessions would be protected by Colorado law. But since she said she was raped at the academy, Air Force officials believe they can subpoena Bier's records.

Defense lawyers for former Cadet Joseph Harding, whom Brakey and another woman have accused of sexual assault, won a preliminary ruling from a military judge ordering that the records be turned over to determine their admissibility. And the Randolph Air Force Base official who supervises the Texas defense team for Harding said he doesn't care what Congress says.

Air Force Judge David Brash, who could not be reached for comment, has ordered Bier to respond by today whether she will comply or face arrest by federal marshals.

As of Thursday, Bier still had not found a lawyer willing to take her case. Weeks ago, she typed up her own motion to quash the subpoena, citing Colorado's shield law, and sent it to Randolph, but a prosecutor at Randolph told The Post they had not received it.

"I'm having trouble finding an attorney who says he's not conflicted about the case," Bier said Thursday, acknowledging that the clock was ticking. Leaders of two victim-rights organizations said late Thursday they would try to help Bier find a lawyer with expertise in military affairs.

The case, said Sanchez, D-Calif., should be a wake-up call to Congress that a stronger shield law within the armed forces is needed to protect counselors from subpoenas.

"The military really doesn't understand these trauma issues," Sanchez said, adding that she plans to work with Graham and other congressional colleagues to legislate better protections. "They have no idea how important confidentiality is to a sexual-assault victim."

Victim-rights organizations have noted for years that the military regulation is so riddled with broad exceptions - eight in all - that the privilege for therapists' records can be virtually wiped out in practice.

Bethel, meanwhile, said that if anyone is upset about the subpoena, they should blame the judge.

"Believe me, judges rule against the defense far more often than they rule for the defense," he said. "The judge made the ruling, not the defense counsel. If anyone believes the judge's ruling is wrong, they should take up their grievance with the judge, not with defense counsel. I can't make it any plainer than that."

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