
Measure would create office to deal with sexual assault, domestic violence problems

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ARLINGTON, Va. — Following heated congressional hearings on sexual assaults in the military, particularly in combat zones, one legislator wants to add \$3 million to the Pentagon's 2005 spending bill to create an office to streamline policies dealing with sexual assault.

Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick, D-Mich., plans to introduce this week an amendment to the 2005 Defense Appropriations Bill that would give the Pentagon extra money to create the central office, fund more victim advocates throughout the military services and give Congress oversight on the Pentagon's progress.

"We're absolutely delighted by this," said Kate Summers, director of services for the Newtown, Conn.-based Miles Foundation, a victim advocacy organization that provides services to victims of violence associated with the military.

The Miles Foundation has seen a dramatic jump in the number of sexual assault cases reported in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan — rising from about 50 in February to 178 as of June 1, Summers said. And the Foundation has another 400 cases from victims at installations worldwide, she said.

Creating the office is the first of many steps the Pentagon must take to quash the problem, Summers said. In addition to creating uniform standards across the services, the Pentagon must begin by defining sexual assault, she said.

For example, the foundation's definition mirrors laws of more than 30 states and the federal judicial system that include various forms of penetration, such as digital, as a form of sexual assault, unlike the military system, which limits sexual assault to unwanted and forced penile penetration, according to Summers and Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Calif., a vocal critic who has accused the Pentagon of ignoring the problem.

But starting with yet another Pentagon office might not best serve the troops, Sanchez said.

"For me, I'd much rather see less of another bureaucratic office in the Pentagon and

more on training and victim advocates,” she said.

In spite of her objection, she intends to vote in favor of the measure.

“I’ll support the measure because you have to continue to send the message, and part of the solution starts at the top, though this is not the first place I would put limited resources.”

Kilpatrick’s amendment would create a Pentagon office that combines advocacy services for both sexual assault and domestic violence victims, two forms of abuse that often are linked, Summers said. “It’s wise to bring the two together in a central office.”

The House of Representatives is scheduled to begin action on the appropriations bill this week.