July 25, 2013

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand,

The National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV) is the voice in Washington for 56 state and territorial sexual assault coalitions and 1300 local rape crisis centers working to end sexual violence and support survivors. The NAESV Board of Directors offers its support for your legislation, the Military Justice Improvement Act, and thanks you for your leadership on these important issues. After much thoughtful deliberation on responses to and prevention of military sexual assault (MSA), NAESV believes that utilizing independent, specially trained prosecutors to pursue these cases is an essential component of reducing retaliation, increasing reporting, and responding to the expressed needs and desires of survivors.

Sexual assault within the military continues to occur at alarming levels with 26,000 anonymously reported incidents in 2012 alone according to Department of Defense (DoD) estimates. During this same period, only 3,300 service members reported their assaults. Combined with the heart-wrenching stories of survivors, these facts reveal the depth of the problem of MSA and demand incisive action.

Sexual violence is an endemic and epidemic social problem in our nation. The victim blaming attitudes of the civilian world carry into military service, and those attitudes carry over into tours of duty. The military has embraced the role of being a standard bearer of discipline, honorable action, and integrity. An opportunity exists to cultivate attitudes, behaviors, and responses in the military that blaze a trail for a burgeoning national and international response to sexual violence.

Any solution to this problem must be multifaceted, and NAESV offers a number of policy suggestions in our position statement on military sexual assault. However, without the recommendations you have put forward in the proposed Military Justice Improvement Act, the substantial change we need to see may not happen. NAESV supports your efforts to amend the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Bill to include the Military Justice Improvement Act.

Please let us know how we can support your valiant and essential advocacy on behalf of survivors.

Sincerely,

Monika Johnson Hostler
Board President

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
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