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HEARING TESTIMONY OF REBEKAH HAVRILLA BEFORE THE  
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES  
COMMITTEE, MARCH 13, 2013

Good morning. My name is Rebekah Havrilla. I am currently the Outreach and Education Coordinator for Service Women's Action Network. I previously managed SWAN's National Helpline for Legal and Social Services from May 2011 to December 2012. During that time, I assisted and provided referrals for over 600 service members, veterans and their families on issues related to military rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment. These included overcoming barriers to getting VA Military Sexual Trauma claims accepted, overcoming homelessness and accessing housing, and finding quality mental health care.

I hail from the great state of South Carolina where I grew up and lived until I joined the Army in 2004. I was an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician and achieved the rank of Sergeant in three years and three months. I deployed to Afghanistan from September 2006 to September 2007 and spent the majority of my time in the eastern provinces where I was assigned to Taskforce Paladin, a Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell tasked with Improvised Explosive Device (IED) response and intelligence operations. I also spent time running route clearance missions with multiple combat engineer companies. I was awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal for my achievements while deployed and was given an Army Achievement Medal and Good Conduct Medal before I left active duty.

My deployment brought more than just the stress of occupational hazards. During my tour, one of my team leaders continuously sexually harassed me and was sexually abusive towards me. This behavior caused me so much anxiety that I ended up self-referring to mental health and on medication to manage not just the stress of my deployment, but also the stress of having to live with an abusive leader and co-worker. One week before my unit was scheduled to return back to the United States, I was raped by another service member that had worked with our team. Initially, I chose not to do a report of any kind because I had no faith in my chain of command as my first sergeant previously had sexual harassment accusations against him and the unit climate was extremely sexist and hostile in nature towards women. After disclosing my rape to a few close friends, I ended up filing a restricted report sixty days before I left active duty against both my rapist and my team leader, but had no intentions of ever doing a formal investigation.

I began a job as a contractor and entered the Reserves at Fort Leonard Wood, MO and tried to start a different life for myself. Reintegration was challenging and I had few support systems to rely on. I struggled with depression and the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress. Approximately a year after separating from active duty, I was on orders for job training and during that time I ran into my rapist in a post store. He recognized me and told me that he was stationed on the same



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installation. I was so re-traumatized from the unexpectedness of seeing him that I removed myself from training and immediately sought out assistance from an Army chaplain who told me among other things, that the rape was god's will and that god was trying to get my attention so that I would go back to church. Again, I did not file an unrestricted report against my rapist.

Six months later, a friend called me and told me they had found pictures of me online that my perpetrator had taken during my rape. At that point, I felt that my rape was always going to haunt me unless I did something about it so I went to Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and a full investigation was completed. The initial CID interview was the most humiliating thing that I have ever experienced. I had to relive the entire event for over four hours with a male CID agent whom I had never met and explain to him repeatedly exactly what was happening in each one of the pictures that were found. After the interview was completed, I heard nothing from the investigator until four months later when CID requested that I come back in to repeat my statement to a new investigator who was taking over my case. I almost refused. During the four months of waiting without any word on the case except phone calls from my friends who had been interviewed, I lived in constant fear that I might run into my rapist again or that he might retaliate against me in some way. I decided to continue with the case even though I felt that nothing was ever going to be resolved and six months later, I was told that even though my rapist had admitted to having "consensual" sex with me while married, his chain of command refused to pursue any charges of adultery and the case was closed.

The military criminal justice system is broken. Unfortunately, my case is not much different from the many other cases that have been reported. I feared retaliation before and after I reported, the investigative process severely re-traumatized me, many of the institutional systems set up to help failed me miserably, my perpetrator went unpunished despite admitting to a crime against the UCMJ, and commanders were never held accountable for making the choice to do nothing. What we need is a military with a fair and impartial criminal justice system, one that is run by professional and legal experts, not unit commanders. We also need an additional system that allows military victims to access civil courts if the military system fails them. Without both military criminal justice reform and access to civil courts, military sexual violence will continue to be widespread and a stain on the character of our Armed Forces. Thank you for your time.