



Legislative Alert



Vietnam Veterans of America, May 11, 2021

Vietnam Veteran of America (VVA) supports S.1520, *The Military Justice Improvement Act of 2021*, introduced by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). This legislation would reform the disposition of charges and convening of courts-martial for certain offenses under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and increase the prevention of sexual assaults and other crimes in the military.

The departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs acknowledged sexual trauma as a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) in the *Defense Authorization Act of 2005*. Despite the recent focus on prevention, reports of sexual assault in the military continue to climb. The *FY2019 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military* records 7,825 reports of sexual assault involving servicemembers as either victims or subjects, a three percent increase over reports received in FY2018.

Military Sexual Trauma and Sexual Harassment must be treated as crimes and adjudicated as such. Women veterans are twice as likely as their male counterparts to develop Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and approximately one out of four women veterans report Military Sexual Trauma. Survivors may fear that their own actions may be cause for punishment.

VVA has long been vocal on the issue of sexual assault in the military, providing testimony as early as 1992 during Hill hearings precipitated by the Tailhook scandal. We stand with the thousands upon thousands of victims who have suffered for decades. At last, the issue of sexual assault can no longer be swept away, and finally, the American public is learning of the immensity of this unacceptable and disturbing military “secret.”

We believe it is time to make real change to the process if real action is to be taken in its attention to the victims and the violence. Fear of reporting the crime of sexual assault is a barrier in addressing the justice these victims deserve. Their legal counsel and defense should be no less than what a civilian receives in our court system.

Vietnam Veterans of America’s founding principle is, “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.” The men and women of our Armed Forces deserve to be treated with dignity and respect for proudly serving our country in the United States Armed Forces, and we strongly support S.1520.

Please Act, and Contact your Senator NOW, and send the prepared letter, asking them to support S.1520, *The Military Justice Improvement Act*, because military survivors deserve justice.