



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
SB 693, An Act Concerning Prosecution of Military Sexual Assault Charges
Veteran's Affairs Committee, February 17, 2015
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Director of Public Policy & Communication

Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, and members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee, my name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am the Director of Public Policy & Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS supports the intent of raised bill SB 693, An Act Concerning Prosecution of Military Sexual Assault Charges. CONNSACS is the state's leading voice to end sexual violence and the coalition of our state's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs, which provide free and confidential sexual assault crisis counseling and victim advocacy to thousands of women, men and children, of all ages, each year.

Certified sexual assault victim advocates provided hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information and referrals to victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state, and community education and professional training presentations. CONNSACS also employs specialized post-conviction victim advocates who represent victims and their interests throughout the state as part of the Office of Adult Probation Sex Offender Supervision Units and Parole Special Management Units.

CONNSACS supports the intent of SB693 An Act Concerning Prosecution of Military Sexual Assault Charges but would urge the committee to ensure that a victim of sexual assault decide if civilian authorities be contacted.

Military sexual assault impacts both service men and women in active duty, on reserve, and in the National Guard. The Department of Defense has reported that 19,000 service men and women experienced sexual assault in 2014¹. In 2013, US soldiers were 15 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than killed in combat by an enemy². The annual report from the Department of Defense on the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response from this year found that 48% of women and 10% of men were sexually harassed and 8% of service women and 1% of service men experienced unwanted physical contact³.

¹Thompson, M. (2014, Dec 4). Time Magazine. Military's War on Sexual Assault Proves Slow Going. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3618348/pentagon-sexual-assault-military/>

² Simmons, C. (2014, Aug 21). California Military Sexual Assault Legislation Signed by Governor Brown. Retrieved from http://californianewswire.com/2014/08/21/CNW20508_162756.php/california-military-sexual-assault-legislation-signed-by-governor-brown/

³ Department of Defense (2015, February). Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies. Retrieved from http://sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/MSA/APY_13-14_MSA_Report_Executive_Summary.pdf

In order to seek support, whether that is medical, legal or advocacy support, a victim of sexual assault within the military must go through the chain of command. For a variety of reasons, such as conflict of interest, undue shame and blame, and a familial camaraderie, victims choose not to disclose. In fact, according to the Department of Defense annual report, only 25% of victims came forward and reported the crime. Of the victims who came forward, over 60% were shamed or shunned⁴.

Victims of sexual assault in the military have two reporting options, restricted and unrestricted. If a victim makes an unrestricted report, this means that they desire medical treatment, counseling, legal assistance, and an official investigation of the crime. If a victim makes a restricted report, they seek all of the supports listed above, but do not wish to notify command or law enforcement.

Based on the experiences of our partners in other states, CONNSACS urges lawmakers to specify that the legislation is intended for unrestricted reporting and to ensure that a victim of sexual assault who makes an unrestricted report be given the choice to involving civilian authorities. An unintended consequence of a one-size-fit all approach is larger numbers of restricted reports, for those victims who don't wish to involve civilian authorities but are interested in an official investigation. CONNSACS also urges the committee to adopt other measures found in California law, most notably, an annual report of military sexual assault and prevention efforts to the Governor and Legislature⁵.

Thank you for taking on this extremely important issue and working to ensure that victims of sexual violence in the military have access to all available supports and resources. I welcome any questions or comments.

⁴ Thompson, M. (2014, Dec 4). Time Magazine. Military's War on Sexual Assault Proves Slow Going. Retrieved from <http://time.com/3618348/pentagon-sexual-assault-military/>

⁵ Simmons, C. (2014, Aug 21). California Military Sexual Assault Legislation Signed by Governor Brown. Retrieved from http://californianewswire.com/2014/08/21/CNW20508_162756.php/california-military-sexual-assault-legislation-signed-by-governor-brown/