



Protect Our Defenders

Strengthen our Military. Prosecute Rape. Support Survivors.

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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

TAILHOOK WHISTLEBLOWER STARTS PETITION DEMANDING CONGRESS INVESTIGATE LACKLAND SEXUAL ASSAULT SCANDAL

Ret. Naval Aviator Paula Coughlin-Puopolo calls on Chairman of House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Buck McKeon to hold congressional hearing; launches online petition on Protect Our Defenders website and Causes.com, the online advocacy platform

Washington DC – More than 20 years ago, 87 servicewomen were sexually assaulted while serving in the U.S. Navy, in what became known as the “Tailhook scandal.” Paula Coughlin-Puopolo was one of the 87. The former Naval Aviator reported the incident to senior officers, but they did nothing. So she went public. Today, Paula is going public again demanding the Chairman of House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Buck McKeon (R-Los Angeles County) hold a congressional hearing about the criminal scandal at Lackland Air Force Base. At least 31 female trainees at Lackland say they were raped or sexually assaulted by their instructors.

“Unfortunately, our military leadership has made no changes that stop this predatory criminal behavior. The epidemic of criminal sexual assault and rape within our armed services has only gotten worse,” says Paula Coughlin-Puopolo in her online petition to Rep. Buck McKeon, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. “Congress should open an investigation immediately and then put an end to the ‘systemic issues’ of military rape and sexual assault by legislating fundamental reform.”

Paula launched her [online petition](#) on Protect Our Defenders, the human rights organization fighting to reform the U.S. Military’s system for handling rape and sexual assault and Causes.com, the online advocacy platform.

“The unfolding scandal at Lackland shows how little has changed since Paula dared to come forward and speak out about Tailhook,” said Nancy Parrish, President of Protect Our Defenders. “There are thousands of similar stories every year in our armed forces, but because of our broken system of military justice -- nothing changes. It is like Groundhog Day. The military has proven that it is unable or unwilling to Protect Our Defenders. Our elected officials must do more to end the crisis.”

The Department of Defense estimates that over 19,000 such incidents occurred in 2010 alone but that only 13.5% of sexual assaults are ever reported. Why? Because victims are often blamed, fear career ending retaliation, and are required to report their assault by fellow soldiers to a superior, not law enforcement or medical personnel. The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs estimates over half a million vets have experienced military sexual trauma.

Over the past year Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has [announced several half measures](#) to address the crisis of military sexual trauma, like bumping the reporting of rape and sexual assault further up the chain of command. But, this does little to address the problem. Many survivors have made it abundantly clear that senior commanders are just as capable of covering up assaults and frequently do. Commanders are incentivized to sweep problems under the rug as their careers can be adversely affected if a rape or sexual assault happens under their watch. And the [DOD reports](#), “39% of women report that the perpetrator was a military person of higher rank and 23% indicated the offender was someone in their chain of command.”

The prevalence of rape in our military, the failure to prosecute perpetrators and the retaliation against the victim continues to undermine readiness, unit cohesion and morale.

Paula Coughlin-Puopolo’s petition demanding congress investigate the Lackland sexual assault scandal can be viewed here:

http://action.protectourdefenders.com/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=8040

Paula’s Causes.com petition can be viewed here:

<http://www.causes.com/causes/787301-protect-our-defendersfoundation/actions/1665842>

About Protect Our Defenders: *Protect Our Defenders is a human rights organization. We seek to honor, support and give voice to the brave women and men in uniform who have been sexually assaulted while serving their country, and re-victimized by the military adjudication system – a system that often blames the victim and fails to prosecute the perpetrator. Learn more about Protect Our Defenders at www.protectourdefenders.com or on Facebook at <http://facebook.com/ProtectOurDefenders> or follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ProtectRDfnders>.*

Protect Our Defenders partners with Attorney Susan Burke, Burke PLLC to advance lawsuits filed against the DoD and service academies for repeatedly ignoring rape, sexual assault and harassment, failing to prosecute perpetrators and retaliating against the victim.

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