



Protect Our Defenders

Strengthen our Military. Prosecute Rape. Support Survivors.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 27, 2012

CONTACT: Brian Purchia (M) 202-253-4330
brian@protectourdefenders.com

PRESS RELEASE

PROTECT OUR DEFENDERS BRINGS 200 MILITARY RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS TOGETHER TO CALL ON CONGRESS TO ADVANCE STOP ACT
Survivors deliver letter to Congress in support of STOP Act; signators also featured in The Invisible War

Washington DC – On Wednesday, [Protect Our Defenders](#) delivered letters to Congress signed by almost 200 veterans and survivors of military rape and sexual assault. The supporters include former Coast Guard member Kori Cioca, Navy Lt. Paula Coughlin, Marine Lt. Ariana Klay, Marine Lt. Elle Helmer, USAF Airman First Class Jessica Hinves and USAF Technical Sergeant Michael Matthews, who are featured in the newly released film, [The Invisible War](#).

The letters which were presented to Congresswoman Speier (D-San Francisco/San Mateo) by survivors Elle Helmer, Jessica Hinves, Jenny McClendon and Rebecca Johnson-Stone, is the first time that military rape survivors have coalesced to call for action as a unified group. The letter thanks the 125 co-sponsors of Congresswoman's Speier's Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention Act – or STOP Act (H.R. 3435), but urges Congress to stop delaying and pass the Military Sexual Trauma (MST) legislation.

“Every day that goes by without fundamental reform is another day where rapists are allowed to attack and terrorize fellow service members with impunity,” said Nancy Parrish, President of Protect Our Defenders. “It is time for Congress to act and fix the broken system of military justice by passing the STOP Act.”

Over the last year Defense Secretary Panetta has [announced several half measures](#), 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 the assaults and frequently do. Sometimes they even commit the crimes.

The STOP Act addresses the core issue. It removes the reporting, oversight, investigation, and victim care from the normal chain of command and places jurisdiction in an autonomous and unbiased office comprised of civilian and military experts.

Congress has held 17 hearings over the past 25 years, but incremental steps taken by the Department of Defense to address the problem of rape, sexual assault and harassment have failed. The prevalence of rape, the failure to prosecute perpetrators and the retaliation against the victim continues to undermine readiness, unit cohesion and morale.

As the men and women in uniform make clear in *The Invisible War*, survivors of rape, sexual assault and harassment encounter numerous obstacles in getting immediate and

long-term help. They are often silenced, denied health care and discharged involuntarily. The resulting fear of retaliation helps explain that while 19,000 service members were raped or sexually assaulted in 2010, only 13.5% of the incidents were reported.

For more information on the STOP Act, please visit:

<http://www.protectourdefenders.com/policy-statement/legislation/>

To read Protect Our Defenders' Letter to Congress, please visit:

<http://www.protectourdefenders.com/mst-survivors-write-congress-in-support-of-stop-act/>

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](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.

###