

WRITTEN TESTIMONY  
CONGRESSWOMAN GWEN MOORE

**“National Defense Priorities from Members for the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act”**

**May 8, 2013**  
**House Armed Services Committee**

Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony as your Committee begins its work on the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The National Defense Authorization Act provides an opening to consider needed policy changes and reforms to help provide for our nation’s national defense and support the men and women who are the backbone of those efforts. As your Committee begins this process, I would urge you to keep in mind the need to continue to address the following issues impacting our men and women in uniform.

**Military Sexual Assault**

I applaud the committee for its ongoing work to make sure that the Defense Department effectively and aggressively combats sexual assault, prosecuting such crimes when they occur, and supporting and assisting victims. Ensuring the safety and protection of our men and women in uniform must remain a priority.

Yet, we know there is a long way to go before the military truly “gets it” as recent episodes demonstrates, including attacks on recruits at basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas along with the widely condemned decision by Lt. Gen. Craig Franklin, commander of the 3rd Air Force at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, to overturn a sexual assault conviction. The Congress and the military must remain committed to eradicating this scourge and creating a culture of zero tolerance for such vicious crimes. As the Committee weighs the FY 2014 bill, I urge you to consider:

- Including H.R. 1593, which would amend Title 10, United States Code, to improve the prevention of and response to sexual assault in the Armed Forces by establishing a Sexual Assault Oversight and Response Council and an enhanced Sexual Assault Oversight and Response Office and by requiring the appointment of a Director of Military Prosecutions for sexual-related offenses committed by a member of the Armed Forces.

- Including provisions from H.R. 1079 to address the ability of commanders to unilaterally and without justification overturn sexual assault convictions approved by military courts.

### **Benefits Equality for all Military Spouses**

I hope you also share my commitment to doing all that is possible to ensure that no military spouses and families are denied benefits that they are entitled to and rightly deserve. All military families sacrifice and should be treated equally when it comes to the benefits that our nation makes available to them in recognition of that sacrifice.

With 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' repealed and while court challenges to the Defense of Marriage Act are pending, there is more that Congress can do to ensure that the rights of all of our service members and their spouses, regardless of whether they are of the same-sex or opposite-sex as the service member, are protected.

- I would urge the Committee to make military personnel policies and military and veterans' benefits available to any marriage recognized by a state, regardless of sexual orientation. This change would ensure that in states which do not discriminate in their definition of spouses, military spouses are able to have access to key benefits, including the military health care program and funding to allow that spouse to accompany the servicemember when he or she is assigned to a new duty station, which may otherwise be prohibitively expensive.

### **Mental Health Care Needs**

- I know improving access of our servicemembers to quality mental health care has been a priority for the Committee and I urge you to continue to support existing and authorize new, innovative, and effective tools to address the mental health needs of our men and women in uniform.
- I support bills like H.R. 1464 that will boost education efforts about services that are available and try to erase the pervasive stigma attached with mental health treatment that continues to stymie efforts to improve access.
  - H.R. 1464 would require notice to all members of the Armed Forces, beginning with recruit basic training and the initial training of officer candidates, about the availability of mental health services, to help eliminate perceived stigma associated with seeking and receiving mental health services, and to clarify the extent to which information regarding a member seeking and receiving mental health services may be disclosed.
  - In providing this information, the Department should be required to take all steps to eliminate any stigma associated with seeking and receiving mental health services and to promote the use of mental health services on a basis comparable to the use of other medical and health services.

## **STARBASE**

STARBASE (Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration) is a program aimed at promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education among urban, rural, and disadvantaged elementary school students through partnerships with military volunteers who provide them instruction and hands on learning. After 23 years of operation building partnerships between the military and local communities, the STARBASE program—authorized under 10 U.S.C 2193b—currently has 76 Academies supported by the different branches on military installations in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

In 2012, DoD STARBASE employed 367 personnel and served 2,659 classrooms of students in 365 school district across the Nation. In its FY 2013 request, the Administration noted that “The DoD STARBASE Program is a productive investment in the future of our youth and will help build and enlarge the talent pool of potential workers needed to support the DoD workforce consisting of civilian and military personnel.”

This successful partnership has resulted in a waiting list of installations seeking to join the program and open up new learning opportunities for thousands of young children. The partnership with the military is a key component of this program. Given its success, I urge the Committee to continue to support this program in the FY 2014 NDAA and to reject proposals to remove this program from the Defense Department.

I thank you again for your consideration of these request and all you do for our men and women in uniform and their families.