

Good afternoon Congresswomen and Congressmen-thank you for inviting me here today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about my experiences and share my thoughts.

I've been in the Navy for a little more than 14 years and have served on 6 different ships and lived around the country and world. In August of 2014, someone whom I had considered a close friend raped me. It was an extremely traumatic experience--- and one that nearly destroyed me. Initially I made a restricted report -- I did not want my Commanding Officer to know, nor did I want law enforcement involved. I spent months in shock and the only way I made it through this was with the support of my good friends and the SAPR team. As I progressed in my healing, working through the PTSD, anxiety, and depression I was diagnosed with because of the assault, I moved to a new command, with a new Commanding Officer, I began to consider changing my report from restricted to unrestricted. I was very lucky at my new command- I had a wonderful Commanding Officer and a great work environment. When I decided to change my report to unrestricted, I had amazing support from my Commanding Officer-- someone I consider the best leader I have ever known. He went above and beyond what was required of him in this situation. Unfortunately, I would learn, through my experiences and through listening to other victims' experiences, that this support is not the norm. While I did not expect everyone to be the great leader he is, I did expect to be treated with the same dignity and respect he showed me, and I was not.

When I moved to my new duty station overseas, to be a commanding officer of a warship myself, it was made immediately apparent to me that the fact I was a sexual assault survivor was a burden and inconvenience to my bosses and the upcoming court martial for the person who raped me, was a hindrance to them. Due to appeals regarding a decision the presiding judge in the case made, when I reported to my new command, it was unknown when the court martial would happen. One of the first things my new boss said to me regarding the court martial, was "Well I hope it's not during an important part of the ship's life" which to all I could think was "well the next time I get raped I will try to plan it better." This was the first of multiple comments that my bosses said to me that not only

re-victimized me and were extremely insensitive, but made me seriously question continuing to move forward with the case. One of the most degrading and humiliating occurrences was when my boss was forwarded a copy of the NCIS report that discussed intimate details of the assault. I was called into his office where he told me that he had received, and just read, the report. After he handed me the report and read it, I very seriously considered dropping the case as I did not want my boss reading about my vagina. And when I left my ship for a few weeks to be at the court martial, my boss told me how he had to temporarily relieve someone in command for several months because they had cancer and needed to get treatment. He told me that he would much rather go through what I went through than have cancer. I can tell you, after being diagnosed and treated for breast cancer last year, I would much rather go through that than an assault.

Upon returning from the court martial, nothing within the command environment got better. I was humiliated, ostracized, outcast, and ridiculed from people of every rank. There were multiple events for commanding officers that I was not invited to attend. My ship was given un fair scrutiny -- magnitudes greater than what any other ship was. What nearly broke me, what was almost as bad as the assault, my personal information regarding the assault, was divulged to my peers -- including counseling information I had only discussed with my boss, who then used it to humiliate and demoralize me. If I could have gotten out of the Navy at the point, I would have, but I was in a contract and could not.

As commanding officers in the Navy, we are given a 3 day legal course in preparation for our tours. I was by no means a legal expert but was equipped to deal with the minor infractions that do affect good order and discipline. It is my belief, not just as a military sexual assault survivor but as a former commanding officer, that some infractions are so grievous, so heinous, that they must be elevated to a higher than just the command level. Sending sexual assault cases to a trained military judge shows just how seriously this crime is taken, that we will not allow perpetrators to get away with this crime and it re-enforces to the countless victims that they will be taken seriously. Additionally, victims will feel more comfortable coming forward knowing their bosses will not be reading the intimate details of the assault.

Thank you for your time Congresswomen and Congressmen for allowing me to share a small piece of my story with you.