

**Kate Ranta – Statement for Armed Services Committee’s Hearing on Domestic Violence
September, 18, 2019**

My name is Kate Ranta and I am a survivor of domestic and gun violence. I want to first thank Congresswoman Speier for inviting me to provide testimony today on this important issue, domestic violence in the military. Sadly, my abusive ex-husband’s military command failed to protect us, and it almost cost my father, my son and me, our lives.

My former spouse, Thomas Maffei, was a major in the Air Force. In 2009, we were living in officer housing on Ft. Belvoir. It was there that he began to show increasingly abusive behavior toward the children and me – he controlled every aspect of our lives. On Christmas Eve that year, we had what I call the first altercation that truly scared me. I’d decided to take a photo of my two sons in front of the Christmas tree. Henry was 5 and William was 3 months old. I sat Henry down on the carpeted floor and placed William in his arms, then walked around the corner to grab my camera. All of a sudden I heard the baby crying, Henry crying, and Thomas yelling. I ran into the room to see William on the floor and Thomas pointing and hollering at Henry. Apparently William had spit up on Henry’s arm, which surprised him, and he released his arms and William rolled onto the floor. I scooped up the baby to check him, and he was fine, so I turned my attention to Henry to console him. Of course it was an accident.

Not according to Thomas. He grabbed William from me and took him into the bathroom, dramatically examining his head and claiming there was a mark (there wasn’t) and screaming at me to stop consoling Henry, that he did it on purpose, that he was going to harm the baby. He turned his rage on me, accusing me of favoring one child over the other, saying if Henry harmed William he’d kill him. He then grabbed the car seat and started to put William in it, saying he was leaving and taking the baby and going to the barracks for the night. As he walked away, I begged him not to go, to give me the baby. He did give him over, and I took Henry and ran upstairs to the bedroom and locked the door. About 5 minutes later, he used the key on the door frame to come in after us and told me he’d called the MPs and that I’d be going to jail that night. In front of the children. On Christmas Eve.

The MPs did not come that night, however. He must have been just trying to scare me. It worked. I vividly remember this a decade later because it was so traumatizing.

During this time, Thomas was also pushing to retire after putting in 25 years – he said it was a long process with lots of paperwork. He said he was meeting with people on Andrews to get it done. My parents and my brother and his family were living in Florida, and I wanted to be near them, so we planned to move there when the retirement came through. We bought a plot of land in 2009, in a new community that was going up a mile from my parents’ house. It would take about a year or so for the house to be completed, which he said would be enough time for the retirement process. As time went by and the house was getting closer to completion, we learned that our closing would be in September 2010. But his retirement still hadn’t happened. As the time approached for us to leave for Florida, but he was still active duty and still based at Andrews, he said that he could forge orders to give to those responsible for arranging PCS

moves – that he'd doctor a PDF and give it to them and they'd not even question it. He was right. They took the fake orders and our move was scheduled.

Of course I told him that it was illegal, but he had no fear and definitely didn't care. Of course I knew it was wrong, but there was no stopping Thomas.

The movers came, packed up our belongings and our cars, and we flew to Florida. Keep in mind, Thomas was active duty. And had not been in the office for months and months. And had no accountability. And was AWOL when we left Virginia.

We moved into our new home in early September 2010. Thomas's behavior became erratic, basically as soon as we moved in. I was walking on eggshells. He would control how often we saw my family, and when we did, he would cause a scene and make everyone uncomfortable. One night, he almost overdosed on Ambien – he was stumbling around the house, bouncing off walls, fell into the bathtub and had a bloody nose. I called 911 and he was taken to the hospital. I didn't even go. I was nearing my wit's end.

On Jan. 2, 2011, he took it to another level. He picked a fight with me, then locked me out of our bedroom. I knocked on the door, crying, asking him to let me in, when I heard the sound of a gun chambering. He had many guns in the home. Terrified, I dialed 911 and ran to the front of the house and out the door. I gave the operator the address and told her that my husband was angry and had a gun and I was scared. Then I heard the garage door open and out he came holding our toddler, who was only 2. He got into the car with William on his lap. By instinct, I jumped into the car with them. He sped off up the street, then came to an abrupt stop. He raised his fist at me, his eyes black, and told me to get out of the (expletive) car or he'd punch me in my (expletive) face. I believed him. I jumped out and he sped off around the corner. I ran through the streets, screaming for help, that he had my baby. Nobody came outside, so I decided to run back to the house, thinking the police would be there. They were. And so was Thomas. He'd gotten back before the police arrived, put William back in his crib, and was outside giving his military coins to the officers – telling them he was a veteran (he wasn't, he was active duty) and had survived a Humvee explosion in Iraq (he didn't, he'd never deployed). To them he was a hero and I was a hysterical wife.

I was forced to leave the home with my children and he was allowed to stay. But I was terrified and traumatized and didn't want to see him again. I was scared for our lives.

The next day, I got a temporary restraining order and he was served. I called his commander, Col. Timothy Applegate, at Andrews and told him about the domestic violence incident, about the restraining order, about his soldier not being in Virginia but in Florida, about the fake moving orders. He was quick to get me off the phone, but not before calling me hysterical, and certainly to contact Thomas and find out what was going on. He knew he was in trouble, too. He'd had no idea that Thomas wasn't even in Virginia for 4 months, was AWOL, and knew that this would could affect him and his military career as well. He did ask me to send him the fraudulent orders if I had access to them. I did, and I emailed them.

Thomas knew he needed to get back to Virginia, which was what he did. In the meantime, one of the military wives I'd befriended on Ft. Belvoir was JAG, and connected me with OSI in order to report the situation to them as well. As a result of that, and likely to make this go away for Col. Applegate, Thomas was moved out from under him and placed with a new commander, Lt. Col. Michelle Ryan, at Bolling Air Force Base, as OSI began its investigation. He was to remain on Bolling, with check in times so they knew he had not left the base. OSI investigators came to my home in Florida and seized our computer as part of the investigation. I had faith in this process, as Thomas had not only abused me and needed to be held accountable by the military for that, but also had committed fraud.

During the months he was held at Bolling, Thomas went AWOL two different times. Both times, I got calls from Lt. Col. Ryan that he had not checked in as he was required to, that they could not make contact with him, and that my family and I should go somewhere where he couldn't find us, as she couldn't guarantee he wasn't on his way to Florida. Both times, they did find him a day or two later, and she gave excuses about his whereabouts. Meanwhile, my family and I were hiding in a hotel for several days, with no compensation and also missing work, scared out of our minds. Those in charge of him obviously did not have that tight of a leash on him, as he slipped them more than once.

OSI had begun its investigation in January 2011 and completed it in mid-March. They were looking into spousal abuse as well as fraud. When it was coming to a close, I was contacted by an investigator, who let me know that they'd found him guilty of both and would be recommending court martial. I was relieved – until he then told me that Thomas's punishment would actually be up to his command and that there was a chance that nothing would happen to him. I was floored. How could the Office of Special Investigations find a soldier guilty but not have any control over whether he'd be punished or not? But I still held onto the hope that I was in the right, that I'd taken the steps to keep myself and my family safe, and that his command would protect us.

I was wrong. Shortly after OSI closed the case, Lt. Col. Ryan called me. It was another very short conversation. She said they'd handled it "administratively" and that Thomas would be retired at the end of March. I literally begged her to reconsider. I said he's dangerous. I said I was afraid he'd try to kill us, especially me, given that I'd reported him. She said he'd served 25 years and charging him would cause him to lose his pension. The call ended after that. I knew there was nothing I could do. The military lifted the restraining order they'd put on him, and he was released into society.

A year and a half later, after months and months of civilian court hearings, after months and months of cyberstalking, stalking, vandalism of our cars, fear, and danger, Thomas showed up with a .9mm Beretta, ambushed me at my new apartment and shot through the front door. My father and I were standing inside the door, pushing against it, trying to keep him out. My son William was standing just behind us. After the bullets came through the door, any of which could have hit his child, he pushed his way in and shot some more. A bullet went through my

right hand. He shot my dad point blank in his left side. Another bullet went through my left breast, just missing my heart. Another bullet went into my dad's left arm, leaving it paralyzed. Thomas did this in front of our then 4-year-old son, William. His own son, who screamed "Don't do it Daddy, don't shoot Mommy."

By some miracle, we all lived. The three of us got out of the apartment and Thomas surrendered at the scene. He spent almost 5 years in jail before we had a civilian trial, where he was found guilty for premeditated attempted first degree murder and sentenced to 60 years in prison. Thomas lied to his defense attorney, continuing to pedal his false claim of PTSD due to his military service, when in fact he'd never stepped foot in Iraq or Afghanistan, had never seen combat once in his 25 years of service. They tried to use this fabricated narrative as a defense for his attempted murder. The jury and the judge didn't buy it. We found justice in the civilian court system, not the military.

All of this was avoidable. I hold his command fully responsible. They knew he was dangerous. But instead they chose to not do a thing about it. His pension and 25 years behind a desk were more important than our safety. After the shooting, I emailed his mug shot and media links about the shooting to both Col. Applegate and Lt. Col. Ryan and sarcastically thanked them for looking out for their soldier instead of the soldier's wife and children. I never got a response.

Domestic violence in the military is rampant. There are tons of Thomas Maffeis in their ranks. It's beyond time for victims to be believed by commanders and by the military system in general that is supposed to help families, and for the abusive behavior of service members – particularly officers, who seem to get special treatment – to no longer be swept under the rug. I hope this committee will be as appalled as I am about what happened to us, and will take steps to change this "take care of our own" culture in our military, at the expense of women and children whose lives are at stake.

Thank you.