

### ***Call for Other Branches to Adopt Army Special Victims Units***

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, and Congresswoman Niki Tsongas (MA-5) today commended the Department of Defense (DoD) for its actions against sexual assault in the military after a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that DoD had acted to fully or partially implement 25 previous GAO recommendations intended to reduce incidences.

The GAO report, commissioned by Rep. Slaughter in December 2011, [requested an update on DoD's response to recommendations from previous GAO reports on sexual assault in the military](#). The new report indicated that the DoD had fully implemented 13 recommendations and partially implemented 12 others to improve oversight and response to cases of sexual assault in the military. The Department of Defense noted that several additional recommendations will soon be completed. According to the Department, with the March 30, 2012 activation of the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database, six more GAO recommendations will be closed.

Three of the partially implemented recommendations focus on improving criminal investigations into cases of sexual assault. After learning the results of the report, Slaughter and Tsongas called upon the other branches of the military to follow the Army's lead in this area by instituting Special Victims Units, which better investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases.

"I have been fighting for better protections against and stronger responses to sexual assault for our servicewomen and men for several decades," said Slaughter. "One sexual assault is too many, and I applaud the leaders of our brave men and women in uniform for taking this issue seriously. I'm particularly pleased to see that the Army has implemented Special Victims Units to better protect victims and hope to see the other branches of the military follow in their footsteps. This report underscores just how far we've come, but I will continue the fight to protect our servicewomen and men from the scourge of sexual assault in the future."

"Over the past two years, I have been proud to work with my colleagues on the Armed Services Committee and committed Congressional advocates like Congresswoman Slaughter to provide victims of sexual assault in the military with appropriate rights and expanded legal protections," said Tsongas. "Today's report by the GAO illustrates that important progress is being made to

reduce assaults and identifies additional improvements that need to be made so that perpetrators can be successfully prosecuted. The DoD must continue to implement these recommendations and the safeguards that were included in the Defense STRONG ACT as we work towards the elimination of this crime."

Slaughter and Tsongas have pushed for the inclusion of and funding for improved criminal investigations of sexual assault cases in the military, most recently in [a letter last month to House appropriators asking for full funding of the Army's Advanced Sexual Assault Investigation Training program](#).

Rep. Slaughter has long been a leading voice speaking out against sexual assault in the military. Slaughter is the author of The Force Readiness Protection Act, H.R. 1709, introduced in May of 2011, which would provide a new set of measures to deal with the epidemic of rape and sexual assault in the military. Provisions of her legislation, specifically the ability for victims to be transferred off the base where the assault happened and the requirement for professionals trained in dealing with victims of these crimes to be assigned to each brigade, were included in the National Defense Authorization Act, passed into law on December 31, 2011.

Rep. Tsongas authored the Defense Sexual Trauma Response, Oversight, and Good Governance Act ( Defense STRONG Act) in order to expand the legal rights of service members who have been victims of sexual assault and to strengthen prevention efforts within the Department of Defense. This bipartisan legislation, signed into law by President Obama earlier this year includes provisions to allow victims access to legal counsel, maintain confidentiality when speaking with Victim Advocates, and increases training for sexual assault prevention in the services.

[More on Slaughter's work regarding sexual assault in the military is available here](#) .

[For a copy of the GAO report, click here.](#)

[For a breakdown of the GAO report, click here.](#)

PUBLISHED APRIL 9, 2012