

February 3, 2009 - Rep. Slaughter Introduces the Military Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Act

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Rep. Slaughter Introduces the
Military Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Act

WASHINGTON, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today introduced the Military Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Act, a bill designed to ensure greater protections for service men and women who are victims of violence.

"Sexual

assault and domestic violence are serious problems in our military," said Rep. Slaughter. "Victims of assault, both men and women, should be afforded the same protections under the law as civilians."

This comprehensive bill

addresses domestic and sexual violence in the military by establishing an office of Victims Advocate within the Department of Defense while creating confidentiality protocols to protect the rights of victims within military law. Additionally, the legislation codifies policies for preventing, responding, treating, and prosecuting cases of family violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in the military and among military families.

"It is

unconscionable that our soldiers are too often victimized twice -- first by their perpetrator, then again by the military's lack of an appropriate and compassionate response," added Slaughter. "My bill helps ensure that domestic violence or sexual assault victims in the military receive the treatment and justice he or she deserves."

"While

we have taken steps to address this issue, the problem persists," Rep. Slaughter said. "It's one thing to serve your country and another thing to be assaulted by a fellow soldier, especially in circumstances where it's someone of a higher rank."

BACKGROUND:

Sexual assault and domestic violence are pervasive and serious problems throughout all branches of the military. In March 2007, the Department of Defense (DoD) released their third annual sexual assault report, which stated that there were 2,947 allegations of sexual assaults reported in 2006; a 24 percent increase from 2005. In 2004, the DoD reported 9,000 incidents of spousal abuse. A 2005 Sexual Harassment and Assault Survey of the Service Academies found 6 percent of females and 1 percent of males said they were sexually assaulted in 2004-2005, and less than half the females who experienced sexual assault reported it. In this same survey, 60 percent of female cadets indicated the prevalence of sexual harassment was about the same as when they first enrolled at their academy.

In recent years, Rep. Slaughter and the Women's Caucus have made significant progress in drawing national attention to the problem of sexual assault of women in the armed services, which was a primary focus of the caucus during the 108th Congress. In March 2004, Rep. Slaughter led a hearing on this issue and presented a report containing the transcript of the hearing to U.S. Department of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Following the hearing, in May 2004, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed an amendment championed by Rep. Slaughter that would require the Pentagon to develop a comprehensive and uniform policy to prevent and respond to sexual assault of women in the military.

While the DoD has been making efforts to improve its prevention and response to domestic and sexual violence, services remain incomplete and inconsistent among the various branches. There have been reports that victims advocates have been denied resources to do their job, and in some instances

been forced off bases all together. DoD policies are not codified and do not offer the same protections afforded to civilian victims. And, perhaps most importantly, victims are unable to seek confidential counseling and treatment without fear that their records might become public if they press charges against their assailant.

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