

Good afternoon Chairman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me here today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about my experiences and share my convictions. I would also like to thank my husband Brian for supporting me over these past two years of fighting for justice. I would not be here if it weren't for his strength and support. I've been a military spouse for almost four years now. Though it was my husband's second assignment on active duty, Travis AFB was our first military base, and the first exposure we've had to the military community. In December of 2018, while we were at Travis AFB, I was sexually assaulted by an E-9. This was a person who should have been the highest example of the Air Force core values and whom my husband and I trusted and respected, even viewed as a mentor to my husband, a young CGO at the time. Instead, this person betrayed that trust when he sexually assaulted me after a unit function. This experience nearly destroyed me, our marriage, and it has ruined my husband's Air Force career. I kept my trauma secret for months because I had not yet understood what happened to me. Once I understood this was a sexual assault, I was afraid of what would arise if I said anything at all. After careful reflection of what reporting this could mean for me and my family, I decided to file an unrestricted report. We initially had hope because I was immediately assigned a Special Victims Counsel (SVC) and we had an expedited transfer to Davis-Monthan AFB, where I could be near family.

Although my SVC persistently requested feedback from Travis AFB's Legal Office as to when they wanted a deadline on my decision of whether I wanted to pursue charges or not, they did not give an answer until the day of the deadline. I felt pressured to give a quick response and requested administrative action instead of court martial. However, after giving it more thought, I decided I wanted to pursue charges. The base commander, an O-6, denied my request. I asked for a video conference with him and was denied. Instead, I was allotted a 10 minute phone call where I literally cried to him and explained why I needed to pursue charges. He did not say anything in response, and still denied it. Immediately after my decision of wanting to pursue a court martial, my husband received a Letter of Reprimand from his current commander for drinking with enlisted airmen the night of the assault, along with some false allegations made by airmen who worked directly under my assailant. He appealed this decision as high of the chain as you can go, but it became a Letter of Admonishment permanently on his record, and his promotion was delayed. He is still a 1st Lieutenant. To us, all of this felt like retaliation for having reported the assault and for not backing down when it became clear to us that the Command decided not to prefer charges against the offender. I later found out that my offender had denied everything. The only reason my husband's Chain of Command knew about the allegations that led to him being punished is because we made the decision to file an unrestricted report. It is difficult for me to comprehend that, in hindsight, Brian's career would not have suffered if I remained silent.

My assailant only received nonjudicial punishment and was forced to retire early. The order was issued by the 18th AF commander, disregarded, and then reissued. How is it that my assailant's only consequence is a decreased pension in retirement, but my husband's military career is essentially destroyed? The frustrating part is that everyone in the chain of command

refused to provide me a response as to why this was, and they have all been up for promotion since then.

After exhausting the chain of command, I filed a congressional complaint with two separate offices in my state. The Air Force gave a consistent, yet victim blaming, response. The Air Force claimed that *the* Chaplain encouraged me to believe the sexual activity was non-consensual due to intoxication. This a gross mischaracterization of the drastically needed help my support system was giving me at the time, and an insult to anyone who has ever been assaulted while too incapacitated to defend themselves. But the most egregious of the Air Force's responses to my case was when an Air Force General wrote that marital difficulties between Brian and me would "likely undermine my case". I find it unfair how the Air Force considers a marital disagreement a potential disqualifier when reporting sexual assault.

The Air Force promises survivors "Maximum Support" after reporting sexual assault, but that is not what I felt following my decision to come forward. At the end of the day, even though I begged this colonel, he decided two times not to prosecute the E9 who assaulted me, and it has been detrimental to my life and my husband's career. After it was all over, we felt the repercussions for reporting had been worse for us than the individual who committed the sexual assault; and the Air Force's rationale that finally came out was indeed victim blaming. If what happened to me continues to go on unchanged, survivors will feel reluctant to make an unrestricted report for fear that they too will face retaliation. It pains me to say this, but at many points throughout the process I felt it would have been better had we not reported. If the status quo remains unchanged, bad actors will be able to continue their military careers while victims suffer in silence. I don't feel any justice or fairness in the system that has failed me, even though I did everything right. Because of what we experienced, we have decided not to continue the military couple life we once cherished, but I hope that my testifying here today shows that we remain committed to helping improve justice for survivors and that sharing my story helps shape a different reality for survivors in the future. My wish is that it finally becomes *safe* for survivors to report sexual assault in the military. Thank you.