

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF Not In My Marine Corps, presented by Co-Founder Erin Kirk-Cuomo, before Senate Armed Services Committee, March 14, 2017**

Chairman McCain, Senators of the Committee,

Not in My Marine Corps (#NotInMyMarineCorps) is a group of dedicated active duty and veteran military members, joined together to advocate against sexual harassment and assault in the U.S. Military. This group exists as a vehicle for impacted service members of all military branches to share their stories in an effort to shine a light on the pervasive conduct and attitudes that lead to such toxic behavior. We provide a platform of support, ways to report, mental health services, removal of unwanted content from the web, and legal services. We demand that all service women, service men and civilians receive the protections and respect they deserve, and no longer be subject to these demoralizing behaviors from fellow service members which encourage rape culture and sexism.

The issues of nonconsensual photo sharing, reported for the past week by multiple news outlets, were not a surprise to women in the military. Women service members brought sites with content like Marines United and Anon-IB to their leadership's attention for over a decade, and were told that the online issues were "too big to handle." These photographs were taken without our knowledge, stolen from our social media accounts, or shared beyond the original intended recipient, with the sole intent of exploitation, denigration and ridicule. Women have been subject to surreptitious photo sharing within units and bases for far too long in ways that extend beyond social media. We have received many stories over the past week from service members describing instances of just this type. For example, a Staff Non-Commissioned Officer shared her story on condition of anonymity:

*"I was at a senior enlisted (E-7) leadership school and was participating in outdoor team-building activities. Afterward, a male classmate...asked me if I knew about mind the gap. I said yes, and he said he planned to send in some photos he took from his work phone that day. I became alarmed, and went to the class leader (another male classmate) to confront the issue. I asked to see the photos, and discovered a ...trove of sexist, racist, and generally offensive photos and memes - some saved from outside sources, and some obviously taken secretly - including a photo of me taken without my knowledge, aimed at my upper thigh "gap" and other photos of female classmates' cleavage, etc. The class leader insisted the issue be squashed by simply deleting the photos, and it went no further. Since the photos weren't deleted in front of me, I fear they could be on MU, AnonIB, or similar site."*

Stories like this prove that women in the military are not given a buffer due to rank and its privileges.

Marine Corps Commandant General Neller said last Friday, “the only way we can fix this is if someone comes forward and tells us what happened to them.” We have been coming forward for years. When we came forward we were continually dismissed. We were told to grow thicker skin and suck it up. This is a boy’s club - and boys will be boys. As a response to reporting, we were simply given a forced apology as a form of punishment for the perpetrators. At worst, we were labeled with derogatory terms for reporting, ostracized from our units, and forced out of potential life-long careers in the Marine Corps simply because we spoke up.

*"When I was stationed in 29 Palms, I was hanging out with a few NCOs and we were all having a good time and having some drinks. I consensually had sex with one of them. I found out...his roommate video-taped what happened. He bragged about it. I had to confront him and threaten to tell. I hated having to pull that card and potentially ruin his career, but they forced my hand by putting me in that situation. The Sgt cried and apologized. Destroyed the footage in front of me. Thank God it was in the early 2000s before camera phones and youtube. Thank God I was able to stop it from ruining my career, and his for that matter. He claimed he didn't know his roommate taped us. Maybe that's true, maybe not. I don't care either way. It angers me that even when I thought I was in control of myself and making a consensual decision, there was another male who sought to take control of the situation and exploit me."*

It is not popular to speak truth to power when the message points the finger of culpability right at the top of the proverbial totem pole. It’s nearly impossible to feel safe enough to make a report when the ones accused are in your chain of command. The 2014 Sexual Assault Report from RAND shows that of the total reports made by female service members, 67% of offenders were of higher rank, and 58% were a unit leader/supervisor. Not In My Marine Corps believes senior female Staff Non-Commissioned Officers and Commissioned Officers must take a greater role and have an open door policy for reporting sexual assault and harassment. The chain of command has failed and continues to fail those victimized by sexual assault and harassment.

Since the Marines United story broke last week, military and legislative leaders have acknowledged the need to address the issues of punishing online sexual harassment. There is no substantive or comprehensive federal law that would punish the actions of those involved in Marines United, Anon-IB, or similar sites. We are calling for legislation that makes it a federal crime to distribute a private, visual depiction of a person’s intimate parts, or of a person engaging in sexual act, with a disregard for a person’s lack of consent to the sharing. We also believe an amendment to the Uniformed Code of Military Justice is necessary to specifically address

punitive liability for actions of non-consensual pornography and exploitation, regardless of the means (social media, text message, e-mail) used to distribute.

Not In My Marine Corps requests that all votes on the Department of Defense non-civilian nominations, or general officers, be suspended until every submitted candidate is on the record pledging support to make the issues surrounding the Marines United and Anon-IB nonconsensual photo sharing a priority. These candidates must strongly state their commitment to thoroughly investigate, across military branches, the issues of nonconsensual photo sharing, harassment, assault, exploitation, and online harassment by service members and veterans. We request their support for an amendment to the Uniform Code of Military Justice to specifically address nonconsensual photo sharing, online harassment, and rape culture language as recently revealed on sites like Marines United and Anon-IB. Furthermore, we request that all future Marine Corps general officer candidates state their dedication to ending gender segregation in Marine Corps basic training, as this practice lays the foundation for the actions and attitudes appearing on Marines United and similar sites.

We believe the culture of the military must fundamentally change in order to provide a safe work environment free from harassment and assault, and an end to the mentality in which women are considered inferior. We believe this is a battle that can and will be won; as female Marines, we are accustomed to fighting uphill battles. General Robert Neller expressed a sentiment on Friday during his press conference that women in the Marine Corps have been feeling since our introduction to the Corps. “We have been fighting for 15 years, men and women side by side. (...) So what do you have to do to get in? What do you have to do to get in?” Women have fought and bled on the front lines of this country’s wars dating back to 1812 when Lucy Brewer disguised herself as a man named George Baker and served as a Marine aboard the USS Constitution. Since that day we have been fighting not only for our country, our Corps, but also for acceptance. We wait for the day when the quote by Lt.Gen Thomas Holcomb, 17th Commandant of the Marine Corps, finally rings true for all Marines. “They (Women Marines) don't have a nickname, and they don't need one. They get their basic training in a Marine atmosphere, at a Marine Post. They inherit the traditions of the Marines. They are Marines.”

Signed,

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