

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 10, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We share your commitment to eradicating sexual violence from our Armed Forces. In 2018, roughly 20,500 servicemembers were sexually assaulted. While women represent only 20% of military personnel, servicewomen are the target of 63% of the assaults, with the youngest and lowest-ranking women most at risk. Only 37% of the assaults were reported. And accountability is vanishingly rare. In 2018, only 668 courts-martial were initiated for sex-related offenses, 307 proceeded to trial, and 203 resulted in conviction. This is a broken system that punishes victims while allowing most perpetrators to escape any consequences for their actions.

In light of this appalling situation, we applaud your promise to address the structure of the military justice system and your commitment to appoint a 90-day commission of current and former military leaders, sexual assault survivors and their advocates, and experts to make recommendations on how to better prevent and respond to military sexual violence—including by changing how prosecution decisions are made. We urge you to establish this commission by executive order and to base and staff the commission within the Executive Office of the President instead of the Department of Defense (DoD). DoD has longstanding institutional views on these matters and has routinely stacked similar panels with members who will toe the Department's line. For the commission to be truly independent, balanced, and credible, it must be organized and run outside of DoD.

As chairs of the respective Armed Services subcommittees with jurisdiction on military personnel, we commit to giving the commission's proposals a fair hearing in Congress as we work together with your administration to finally make transformational progress in combatting this glaring stain on our national conscience.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress