

Good afternoon Chairwoman Gillibrand and Ranking Member Tillis, my name is Quinton Mcnair, I am a retired Army veteran with over 7 years in the field of victim advocacy. I currently call Chicago my home, where I own and run a small bakery business and volunteer my time at a nonprofit organization that serves the community. As a former Sexual Assault Response Coordinator or SARC for the 82ND Combat Aviation Brigade, I managed the SHARP program, alongside my Victim Advocates. My primary duties included training, case management, providing resources for over three-thousand soldiers. As well as revolving duties as the installation on-call SARC, participation in Sexual Assault review Boards, and planning for installation events and awareness.

Although I am retired I will always consider those that serve as my brothers and sisters in arms and right now they face an old enemy that's eating away at the integrity and the proud history of our armed forces. An enemy who takes its toll on and off the battlefield and whose wounds scar deep. This enemy is sexual assault. To fight sexual assault we must continue to make strides to change the culture. As a SARC, I was at the front lines of that fight. I used SHARP guidelines to create informative and open discussions about sexual assault. Soldiers responded well to that and it resulted in a decrease in incidents and an increase in reporting. I see support and awareness everywhere and we have come a long way from when I took my first class as a young soldier. However, I find this shift ineffective, especially if/when we fail at accountability.

What is change without accountability? I can recall SHARP training early in my career where we taught soldiers to never go out alone or to cover their drink so no one can slip something in it. They even passed out rape whistles. We essentially taught soldiers how to avoid being assaulted. The onus or accountability was not on the person committing the act, it was on the victim.

I can see the culture has shifted. We now teach consent and intervention. But to end sexual assault we have to do more than shift; we have to change the culture that feeds it. To change the culture that feeds it we have to hold those that commit these acts accountable. Changing the hearts and minds of every single person who may commit sexual assault is a difficult task, I would dare say an impossible task. But we do have the power to hold them accountable. People who commit sexual assault are like sharks hunting, you often aren't aware of them until they attack. Through accountability, we can make the waters so hostile to the sharks that they are afraid to hunt. On the other hand, lack of accountability emboldens them. All of the efforts that SARCS and Victim Advocates around the world put into prevention are lost when we fail to hold people accountable.

I do not doubt that the prevention of sexual assault and harassment is a priority for every leader in our armed forces. It's non-negotiable. Every leader is required to "buy-in" to the program, yet we continue to see examples where that priority was not evident. What is evident is that there is a large gap between the leaders who care because they are required to and leaders who actually care. That gap is made painfully obvious every time a case is purposefully mishandled. That gap is painfully obvious when things spiral out of control as they did at Fort Hood. And right there in the middle of that gap are the lives and careers of the soldiers who suffer from it.

When a sexual assault is reported the first call is made to CID who, independent of the unit, starts a criminal investigation. The findings of that investigation are turned over to the unit for adjudication. While most commanders and their legal team handle cases with integrity, the response isn't uniform across the board. I believe this has been a point of failure far too many times. The effects of a mishandled case are far-reaching and the damage is irreparable. Maybe it's time to try something

new. Perhaps the answer to restoring the faith of our servicemen and women in the SHARP/SAPR program is to handle the adjudication the same way as the investigation, by an entity outside of the unit where the incident occurred.

Sexual Assault and harassment are issues that span mission and personnel readiness, unit cohesion, battlefield effectiveness, and many other areas. In combat, I have to be able to trust my leaders and fellow soldiers with my life. That trust withers or dissipates all together when I can't trust those same people to protect me at home. I dedicated 24 years of my life in service to this country and its values. I am very embarrassed that the US military, where the best of the nation call home, has a problem with protecting its women and men. How do I encourage others to make the same sacrifice I made when I can't guarantee their safety? Not from foreign enemies, but their leaders and fellow servicemembers. I have 2 daughters, 20 and 23 years old, who are both very proud of my service and at one time considered following in my footsteps. Sadly, I discouraged them because, despite the honor of wearing the uniform and all of the benefits that come with serving, there is no honor in going to combat and coming home to be assaulted by the very same people you fought beside. I have seen first-hand, no benefit is enough to heal the emotional scarring that comes with that.

Thank you for your time, attention, and for the opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences. I sincerely hope that this committee can work towards the change needed to resolve this critical issue of sexual assault.

QUINTON M. MCNAIR, SFC, USA, Ret