



Written Testimony of

**Lisa Maatz, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations
American Association of University Women (AAUW)**

**United States Senate Armed Services
Subcommittee on Personnel**

**Hearing on
Sexual Assault in the Military
March 13, 2013**

Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for this important and timely hearing on sexual assault in the military.

On behalf of the 150,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I am pleased to share AAUW's perspective on the importance of equitable and safe climates for women serving their country in the military. AAUW strongly supports "freedom from violence and fear of violence in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities"¹ which extends to freedom from sexual harassment and violence for women serving in the military.

Since its founding in 1881, AAUW has been breaking through barriers for women and girls. We applauded the military's recent decision to officially open combat positions to women. Our executive director, Linda Hallman, a proud nine-year veteran of the United States Army, recently wrote, "Women want to serve and have been serving in combat. We owe them recognition, equal treatment, and our full support."² The decision to open these combat positions to women is a reflection of military leadership recognizing the value of the critical skills women bring to our modern military workforce.

As President Obama remarked, "This milestone reflects the courageous and patriotic service of women through more than two centuries of American history and the indispensable role of women in today's military." However, to maintain a strong military, we must address the problem of sexual harassment and violence all too common among women and men who seek to serve our country.

AAUW strongly supports efforts to protect the rights of military service members and to end the scourge of sexual assault and violence. We believe this issue, which statistics indicate is endemic in the military, must be addressed in a prompt, comprehensive, and sustained manner. Recent surveys of female veterans have found that close to a third were victims of rape or assault while they were serving, which is double the rate of the civilian population.³

According to the Pentagon, nearly 3,000 women were sexually assaulted in 2008, yet the Pentagon also estimates that “80% to 90% of sexual assaults go unreported.”⁴ New research by the Department of Veterans Affairs has found that sexual harassment is at epidemic levels in conflict zones, with half of the women sent to Iraq or Afghanistan reporting being sexually harassed, and nearly one in four reporting sexual assault.⁵ This is unacceptable and must change.

AAUW backs many initiatives to address the problem of sexual assault in the military. Among our efforts is the work of our member-supported Legal Advocacy Fund (LAF). The LAF has provided support to service members who allege in lawsuits (*Cioca v. Panetta*,⁶ *Klay v. Panetta*,⁷ and *Shaw v. Panetta*⁸) that they were sexually assaulted or raped by other service members while serving their country. AAUW is committed to ensuring that these service members have their day in court, despite the Department of Defense’s opposition.

AAUW has worked to raise awareness about military sexual assault.⁹ We have teamed with the filmmakers of the Oscar-nominated documentary *The Invisible War* to arrange screenings for our 1,000 branches nationwide.¹⁰ Thousands of AAUW members, as well as their communities, have seen this important movie and have engaged in discussions about sexual assault and violence in our nation’s military.

In addition, AAUW supports legislation to prevent sexual assault and to punish those who commit sexual assault. We supported Senator Al Franken’s (D-MN) legislation to protect defense contractors from sexual assault,¹¹ and we strongly support Representative Jackie Speier’s (D-CA) Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention Act (STOP Act). The STOP Act would fundamentally change how sexual assault is handled in the military by creating an independent body to investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases. This would remove the inherent conflict of interests that exists in a “command and control” environment, where those in command have incentives to not pursue allegations. As Rep. Speier put it:

“The Defense Department estimates that there were 19,000 sexual assaults in 2010 and that the overwhelming majority of these assaults were never reported. The “why” of these unreported cases isn’t answered by more training and statements of zero tolerance.”¹²

The need for command structure reform has been publicly demonstrated recently through the decision of a senior Air Force commander to overturn the sexual assault conviction of an Air Force fighter pilot.¹³ AAUW is pleased by the attention paid to this decision by Congress and the media, and we support efforts to prevent this type of injustice from occurring in the future.

Through accountability, education, and a robust prosecution system, we can end sexual assault in the military. Such protections are a long time coming, and they are the least we can do to support and respect the women and men around the world advancing this country’s interests and safety. Their civil rights are worth no less than anyone else’s and must be protected by every means at our disposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We are pleased to be working with you on this critical issue.

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- ³ *Time*. (March 8, 2010). *Sexual Assaults on Female Soldiers: Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. Accessed March 6, 2013, from www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1968110,00.html#ixzz12va7eGYf.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ *USA Today*. (December 26, 2012). *VA Finds Sexual Assaults More Common in War Zones*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/26/va-finds-sexual-assaults-more-common-in-war-zones/1793253/
- ⁶ AAUW. (February 2012). *Cioca et al v. Rumsfeld et al*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from www.aauw.org/act/laf/cases/Cioca.cfm
- ⁷ AAUW. (March 2012). *Klay et al v. Panetta et al*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from www.aauw.org/act/laf/cases/Klay.cfm
- ⁸ AAUW. (September 2012). *Mission & Action*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from www.aauw.org/learn/publications/mission/upload/September2012.html
- ⁹ See AAUW. (February 19, 2013.) *Fighting Sexual Assault in the Military*. Retrieved March 6, 2013, from www.aauw.org/article/fighting-sexual-assault-in-the-military/; AAUW. (January 15, 2013). *Weak Progress on Ending Military Sexual Assault*. Retrieved March 6, 2013, from www.aauw.org/2013/01/15/weak-progress-on-ending-military-sexual-assault/; and AAUW. (January 24, 2012). *Making Military Sexual Assault Visible*. Retrieved March 6, 2013, from www.aauw.org/2012/01/24/military-sexual-assault/
- ¹⁰ AAUW. (January 24, 2012). *Making Military Sexual Assault Visible*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from <http://blog-aauw.org/2012/01/24/military-sexual-assault/>
- ¹¹ AAUW. (January 31, 2011). *AAUW Comments to the Department of Defense on Military Contractor Sexual Assault*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from www.aauw.org/act/issue_advocacy/actionpages/upload/DoD_SexualAssaultRegs.pdf
- ¹² Office of U.S. Congresswoman Jackie Speier. (January 2012). *Statement: Congresswoman Speier Responds to DOD Efforts to Curtail Sexual Assault in the Military*. Retrieved January 8, 2013, from http://speier.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=561:statement-congresswoman-speier-responds-to-dod-efforts-to-curtail-sexual-assault-in-the-military-&catid=1:press-releases&Itemid=14
- ¹³ *The New York Times*. (March 11, 2013). *Hagel to Open Review of Assault Case*. Retrieved March 12, 2013, from www.nytimes.com/2013/03/12/us/politics/hagel-to-open-review-of-sexual-assault-case.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=tw-nytimes&r=1&