



# Duckworth: Military Must Reduce Barriers to Reporting Sexual Trauma

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– At today’s Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel Hearing, U.S. Senator and combat Veteran Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) discussed the obstacles that can prevent survivors of sexual assault from reporting it. In particular, Duckworth asked military leaders about the practice of disciplining survivors of sexual trauma for other actions unrelated to an assault, like if they had been drinking underage when the incident occurred. This practice is a significant barrier that can deter victims of sexual assault from reporting crimes and harms the military’s readiness, recruitment and retention efforts. Video of Duckworth’s questions during the hearing is available [here](#).

**“For the average troop who is the victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault, one of the things that can happen is the perpetrator can say ‘Well, you were drinking underage. If you report this, you’re going to be prosecuted for underage drinking or fraternization.’ And that threat itself will prevent that victim from reporting what happened to them,” Duckworth said. “Is there any move towards lowering those barriers, such as immunity or deferral of action, so the average troop knows that even if they are underage drinking, they need to come forward and report?”**

Earlier this month, Duckworth [helped introduce bipartisan legislation](#) to improve the resources and care for survivors of military sexual trauma (MST). The *Servicemember and Veterans’ Empowerment and Support Act* expands the definition of MST to ensure servicemembers and Veterans who experience online sexual harassment can access VA counseling and benefits. It also codifies a lower burden of proof so more survivors are eligible for trauma and mental health care related to MST, even if they didn’t feel comfortable reporting the event to their chain of command while in service.