



# Duckworth: Military Must Improve Handling of Military Sexual Assault

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– At today’s Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel hearing, U.S. Senator and combat Veteran Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) listened to testimony from survivors of sexual assault in the military and asked for their suggestions on how to improve the military’s response to this serious issue and promote accountability. Video of Duckworth’s questions at the hearing is available [here](#).

**“I am in awe of the bravery shown today by the survivors who are testifying before the Senate and from my colleague, Senator McSally. I agree that the military has utterly failed at handling sexual assault through the Uniform Code of Military Justice process and I will push for meaningful reforms,”** said Duckworth. **“As a former commander of an assault helicopter company, I want to know what else can be done beyond successful prosecutions that bring perpetrators to justice to make the lives of survivors better and ensure they have what they need to heal and be able to resume the careers they dreamt about from the time they entered the military.”**

At [a Senate hearing last week](#), Duckworth asked military leaders about some of the significant barriers that can prevent survivors of sexual assault from reporting incidents when they occur, which harms the military’s readiness, recruitment and retention efforts. In particular, she discussed the practice of collateral misconduct, in which survivors are disciplined for other actions unrelated to an assault if, for instance, they had been drinking underage when the incident occurred.

Last 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.