

Attorney General Raoul Urges Congress To Reform Military Justice For Sexual Assault Survivors

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CHICAGO – Attorney General Kwame Raoul and Nebraska Attorney General Doug Peterson led a bipartisan coalition of 29 attorneys general calling on Congress to pass the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act of 2021. The

legislation, which has strong bipartisan support, would reshape the manner in which the United States military investigates and prosecutes sexual assault.

“We owe an immense debt of gratitude to the men and women who serve our nation and protect our freedom.” Raoul said. “They deserve a justice system that is equipped to handle sex-related crimes. As we honor Veteran’s Day, it is past time to reform the military justice system to ensure that all survivors can report sexual assault without fear of retaliation, and to guarantee an unbiased investigation and prosecution of sexual assault charges.”

In the letter, Raoul and the coalition highlight the need to address serious, longstanding problems in underreporting and prosecuting sexual assaults in the military. The Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act would professionalize the military’s prosecution of serious crimes like sexual assault. The act addresses widespread reluctance to report sexual assault due to bias in the military chain of command’s power to decide whether cases move forward to a trial. The act would instead ensure that decisions about whether to prosecute sexual assault or domestic violence crimes are made by independent, trained, professional military prosecutors, while leaving uniquely military crimes within the chain of command.

Additionally, the act requires increased sexual assault prevention training for military personnel, as well as added instruction for prosecutors on the proper conduct, presentation, and handling of sexual assault and domestic violence cases. If passed, the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act would constitute the largest change to the military justice system in the last 70 years.

Each year, thousands of service members experience sexual assault. Of those, only a small percentage ever report their assault – often because they suffer retaliation. In many cases, the assailant is someone in the service member’s own chain of command, creating an additional risk of retaliation. Even when sexual assaults are reported, only a handful of perpetrators are held accountable; in fact, only approximately 9% of assaults result in conviction.

The Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act would support the work Raoul and other state attorneys general do to protect victims of sexual assault and advocate on behalf of military members and veterans. Raoul’s Military and Veterans Rights Bureau advocates for veterans and service members in crisis, protects rights through enforcement of veteran and service-member related laws, and works to ensure veterans, service members, and their dependents receive benefits.

The Illinois Attorney General’s office also provides services aimed at protecting assault survivors, such as offering grant funding through the Violent Crime Victims Assistance

Act to help victims of violent crime recover and rebuild their lives. For more information about the services Raoul's office provides, please visit the Illinois Attorney General's website, or call 1-800-382-3000 (Military and Veteran's Rights) or 1-800-228-3368 (Crime Victims Assistance).

Joining Raoul and Peterson in calling on Congress to pass the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act are the attorneys general of Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.