

[Military Sexual Assaults Reported Rise by 10%](#)

NEW YORK, NY (May 7, 2018) – In the wake of the April 30 release by the Department of Defense's (DoD) Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, which shows reports of assaults continue to rise, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) calls on Congress to finally take these horrible crimes seriously and enact the bi-partisan S. 2141, the *Military Justice Improvement Act (MJIA)* sponsored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York. IAVA also again called on the President and VA to do their part by supporting the bi-partisan *Deborah Sampson Act*, sponsored by Senators Tester of Montana and Boozman of Arkansas.

The new Pentagon report of 2017 data shows a shocking increase in reported sexual assaults of 10 percent over 2016 figures, with the Marine Corps showing a stunning 14.9 percent increase – the largest increase among the services. In [IAVA's most recent Member Survey](#), 35% of women and 1% of men who responded were survivors of Military Sexual Assault. More troubling, only 19% of women and 33% of men who responded thought DoD is effectively addressing Military Sexual Assault.

“This latest data should spark immediate action from all leaders in Washington and all conscientious Americans. Too many of our troops are bravely stepping forward to report they have been victims, only to have their calls for help ignored by Congress. This is a matter of morality and national security. America's troops can not effectively focus on fighting our wars if they are under attack from their own. While the DoD views the increase as an increased willingness to report these crimes, it remains painfully obvious that adequate culture change has not taken hold across the armed services to stop the attacks from actually happening in the first place,” **IAVA Founder and CEO, Paul Rieckhoff, said** . “This issue is and will remain a top priority for hundreds of thousands of female and male IAVA members nationwide. We campaigned for and were pleased to see enacted into law last year the PRIVATE Act to give the military the tools it needs to stop servicemembers who inappropriately share intimate photos in the wake of the Marines United scandal. That was just one step of progress. But clearly, much more is needed. The President and too many members of Congress have been notably silent. The lives and well being of America's finest sons and daughters hang in the balance. Especially as Mother's Day approaches, Congress must pass the *Military Justice Improvement Act* and *Deborah Sampson Act* and continue to focus maximum attention on military sexual assault.”

The MJIA would shift the prosecution of serious crimes, including sexual assault, from the military's chain of command to independent military prosecutors.

Since the bill's introduction, [18 Veterans Service Organizations](#) have signed on as partners, and thousands of veterans and supporters have engaged their

Members of Congress to encourage their support.

The *Deborah Sampson Act* does the following:

- Asks for a sensing of Congress to change the dated and exclusionary VA motto that currently reads, “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and for his orphan.”
- Empowers women veterans by expanding peer-to-peer counseling, group counseling and call centers for women veterans,
- Improves the quality of care for infant children of women veterans by increasing the number of days of maternity care VA facilities can provide and authorizing medically-necessary transportation for newborns,
- Eliminates barriers to care by increasing the number of gender-specific providers and coordinators in VA facilities, training clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy and improve the environment of care for women veterans,
- Provides support services for women veterans seeking legal assistance and authorizes additional grants for organizations supporting low-income women veterans,
- Improves the collection and analysis of data regarding women and minority veterans, and expands outreach by centralizing all information for women veterans in one easily accessible place on the VA website.

IAVA Legislative Director, Tom Porter, stood with Gillibrand and a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators at a [press conference](#) announcing introduction of the bill last fall.

“With our reliance on an all-volunteer force that comes from less than 1% of America, we have to ensure that men and women know that their commanders will have their backs,” **Porter said at the time.** “When my three daughters are making their career choices, I’d like to be able to recommend the military, but that depends on how this problem gets addressed.”

IAVA Chief Policy Officer, Melissa Bryant, also spoke with [Carol Costello on HLN](#) about the need to pass MJIA last fall.