

United States Senate

March 18, 2019

The Honorable Patrick Shanahan
Acting Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Acting Secretary Shanahan,

Thank you for your commitment at last week's Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) hearing to partner with me to tackle sexual assault in the military through a focused effort of experts and military leaders. Thousands of sexual assaults continue to be reported each year, yet very few are held accountable at trial. Although much effort has been put towards prevention and response to military sexual assault, these numbers are just intolerable.

As an Air Force Academy graduate; 26-year military veteran; former squadron commander; and military sexual assault survivor myself, I have a unique perspective on this issue. I strongly believe we cannot take responsibility away from commanders due to the unique role commanders play in culture, readiness, good order and discipline, and mission. **However, we cannot accept the status quo.** SASC will be marking up the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in the coming weeks, and we need to explore new initiatives and changes that will make a difference immediately and permanently.

Sexual assault is a crime that is often difficult to prove in civilian and military courts even if reported right away. However, based on my own experiences in the military and on testimony from others, I believe we need to take a fresh look at how these crimes are investigated and prosecuted in the military to ensure the highest chance of success while preserving due process for both the victim and the accused. I have already been engaging with the Air Force Secretary, Chief of Staff, TJAG, and IG on this topic, but we shouldn't limit solutions and ideas to just one military service.

To that end, I request an opportunity to speak with you right away to discuss this matter further. I also request you form a Task Force comprised of myself, representative experts from all military services, and specialized civilian experts, to take a deep dive into this issue. I ask that this Task Force begin meeting immediately with a goal of having recommendations ready for SASC NDAA committee markup. I also request that the Task Force meet the week of March 25 with me personally in order to gauge progress on ideas and reviews.

Thank you for your commitment to combat sexual assault in the military. There are many other aspects in prevention, education, and development of commanders, culture, retaliation, and other topics we must explore as well—but let's start by taking a fresh look at how these crimes are investigated and prosecuted, and by whom, to increase the chances that justice may be served.

I look forward to hearing back from you immediately due to the urgency of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Martha McSally". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martha McSally
U.S. Senate