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**Opening Remarks of Chairman McHugh
Total Force Subcommittee Hearing on
Sexual Assault Prevention and Response in the Armed Forces**

There is a letter written by Sergeant First Class Laurie Emmer, of Fort Bragg, that was published this week in the *Army Times*. The letter is entitled, "*A Leadership Test*" and it sums up why we are here today and why we need to be diligent in our efforts to overhaul prevention and response measures related to crimes of sexual assault in the military.

In Sergeant Emmer's letter, she describes herself as a "seasoned and resourceful senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) and paratrooper." Sergeant Emmer provides her insights from the perspective of being a rape victim and a leader. Sergeant Emmer states, "I must advise victims to report a crime if they seek justice, but I believe they should be aware of the treatment they may receive within their chain of command. I am one who regrets reporting my assault. My assailant was a non-American soldier. Initially, my chain was fantastic and I was treated well, but after I returned from deployment, I found myself constantly running into stone doors." Sergeant Emmer continues her letter by describing accounts of her revictimization resulting from the lack of privacy, victim advocacy, and coordinated care as she sought support services.

Sergeant Emmer closes her letter with the following advice, "Victims still can be great soldiers, but continued victimization after the rape is demoralizing. My leader book now will contain a list on resources for sexual-assault victims, in case any of my soldiers goes through this. I know, as a leader, it is right to report sexual assault, but as a victim, I regret doing so. No soldiers should ever feel that way, be they male, female, enlisted or officer."

Sergeant Emmer's experience is just another example of the system failing our service members. I am concerned that over the past 15 years DOD has been confronted with several major sexual assault and misconduct incidents, including the 1991 Tailhook convention, Aberdeen Proving Ground trainees in 1996, and the more recent Air Force Academy cases. Despite lessons learned and calls for corrective action, many of the

same problems identified in earlier investigations appear to remain unresolved with sexual assaults continuing to plague the military at alarming rates.

Recently, the Department of Defense and the services conducted a series of assessments of their policies and procedures for preventing and responding to sexual assaults. I find it to be a very positive step that during these reviews the Department and services consulted a variety of federal and civilian experts for their valuable insights, especially as we are constantly reminded that problems of sexual assault are not unique to the military but also exist throughout our nation.

Today's hearing is part of the effort of the Total Force Subcommittee to better understand the issues associated with sexual assault in the military and what should be done to provide effective prevention and response measures. To that end, the subcommittee has several objectives for today's hearing:

- We would like to understand what the 90-day Department of Defense Task Force and the services have found from their assessments of sexual assault policies and programs, to include the strengths and weaknesses.
- We want to know what specific recommendations the Department of Defense and services have made and what is being implemented in order to assure appropriate prevention and response capabilities and how these measures will be institutionalized and resourced short- and long-term.
- We would like to understand the Department of Veterans Affairs impressions of the Department of Defense efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assault, the scope of the problem of sexual trauma in our veterans, and the needs of veterans who have experienced sexual trauma while in the military. We are fortunate today to have three witnesses who will address the Department of Veterans Affairs Sexual Trauma Program. As many of our service members leave the military and transition to the VA system, it is imperative that sexual assault victims have a continuum of care for their emotional and medical needs.
- Finally, we want to understand from a broader perspective the nature of sexual assault problems in our nation and what our civilian experts view as priorities for the Department of Defense as it develops effective policies and procedures.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for their dedication and service in their various roles as they work to combat the horrific crime of sexual assault. Your compassionate concern for our service members and especially the victims of sexual assault gives me confidence that we can soon achieve a safe and supportive environment for our women and men in uniform.

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