

Dear Senator:

DATE

The undersigned organizations write to express our strong support for the bipartisan Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Accountability Act (S. 4877). We thank Senators Shaheen and Kennedy for introducing this critical, commonsense legislation to address a long-standing legal barrier facing survivors of military sexual trauma across all branches of our armed forces and urge you to co-sponsor this bill for the sake of survivors and victims of military sexual assault and their families and our national interest in cohesion, readiness, and effectiveness. A strong, battle-ready military depends on accountability, discipline, and trust within the ranks. By granting service members the same legal protections afforded to civilians when institutional failure occurs, this legislation directly safeguards force effectiveness, retention, and national security.

After the tragic murder of Vanessa Guillen, Congress made meaningful strides to reform the military justice system and empower service members to report sexual assault and harassment. However, significant institutional gaps remain, including when failures occur at the administrative or command level, and victims of military sexual trauma, or their families, still face obstacles seeking legal relief after suffering abuse. The *Feres* doctrine, a judicially created barrier, prevents active-duty service members and veterans from suing the federal government under the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) for injuries that are “incident to service.” Federal courts have interpreted *Feres* to apply broadly, even for actions such as sexual assault. As a result, victims of sexual assault, or their families, have been prevented from seeking relief under the FTCA, including when their assault resulted from institutional negligence, such as a failure to investigate reported abuse or take preventive action. Civilians possess the legal right to seek recourse when they suffer sexual assault by military members, and our nation’s service members should be afforded no less. The MST Accountability Act would address this injustice and incentivize greater oversight and accountability for service members.

By creating a narrow, targeted exception within the FTCA, S. 4877 ensures survivors have a clear path to legal recourse without compromising military command structure or operational readiness. Specifically, the MST Accountability Act provides key protections by:

- **Establishing Federal Accountability:** Permitting covered service members and veterans to bring civil claims against the United States when government negligence—including failure to prevent or investigate sexual misconduct—contributes to harm.
- **Protecting Essential VA Benefits:** Ensuring the survivors of sexual violence are not penalized for seeking justice, specifically by making clear that any awarded compensation under this process will not offset or reduce Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or Department of Defense healthcare and disability benefits previously earned by the veteran.
- **Ensuring Fair Timelines:** Extending the statute of limitations to five years and tolling deadlines during active military or administrative investigations, giving survivors the necessary time to seek justice without fear of administrative delay.



Military readiness and cohesion depend directly on trust and safety within the ranks. When institutions fail to properly address or prevent sexual misconduct, it harms retention, morale, and overall force effectiveness. Providing a mechanism for legal accountability does not undermine the military; rather, it reinforces institutional trust and ensures our force remains resilient and effective. Our organizations stand united across missions in strong support of the Military Sexual Trauma Accountability Act. We urge you to co-sponsor this landmark bipartisan legislation that will tear down long-standing judicially created legal obstacles, ensure true accountability, and support the long-term health and well-being of our nation's military members.

Thank you for your necessary and dedicated service to our nation's service members and veterans.

Sincerely,

Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)

National Women's Law Center Action Fund (NWLC AF)

Undersigned Organizations:

8B Media

Human Rights Campaign

SPARTA

Minority Veterans of America

National Women's Political Caucus

American College of Obstetricians &
Gynecologists

SisterReach, Inc

Out in National Security

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

Honest Growth Studios

Sahl Communications Inc

Zoomies Against Sexual Assault (ZASA)

Vet Voice Foundation

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Reproductive Freedom for All

Women in the Service Coalition, Inc (WiSCI)

Minority Veterans of America

Lifting the Silence(d): A MST Resistance
Coalition, Inc.

Protect Our Defenders Foundation

Transgender American Veterans
Association

End Rape On Campus

The Chamberlain Network

National Organization for Women

Repatriate Our Patriots

The Consent Awareness Network

Legal Momentum

