

Thank you it is very generous of you to allow me to speak today. My name is Victoria Sanders. I am in town this week with the 26,000 Letter Project a grassroots lobby effort. It was created to give a voice to the voiceless who were sexually assaulted while serving in the military. Many of them were raped like I was in 1975. Retaliation is a constant theme in these letters. It comes in many forms. The level of not understanding the basics of how a victim will act an hour, a day, a week later is evident in my story. When I went to hospital to have the rape kit done they were more concerned about the fact I needed to wear a hospital gown home, because they had taken all my clothes as evidence, than they were about the fact I had no car or friend to go to my home and get me something to wear. I had been at Ft Carson 30 days when I was raped. CID was no better it took me two days to hand write the complaint with no errors. I was stuck in a windowless room with two men who kept asking if I want to continued, to go forward with the complaint. When I returned to my unit word had already gotten around. I had to work next door to my rapist and he made sure his was the first face I saw in the morning and the last thing I saw at night. Men would stop at my office to call me slut or whore and make kissing noises. Walking outside men would hang their penis out of a window and yell at me what they wanted to do. These things were never seen by others. I had a target on my back and everyone was taking shots at me. When I was finally transferred it was to the 440th Signal Battalion. People would literally talk behind my back saying loud enough for me to hear "don't talk to her she will cry rape". Being called a every foul name known to mankind was demoralizing. I felt less than human.

Holding people accountable is the missing piece of the equation that has been consistent since I served. A female JAG officer I saw told me that even though my rapist had confessed we could not hope for a conviction because and I quote "you are not a nun, a virgin, or a dyke". Retelling my story to every commander and senior NCO in my command and his command keep me in victim mode and just reinforced the harassment from my fellow soldiers. My rapist was given Non Judicial Punishment. Looking back now that was fortunate because I have heard so many say nothing happened or like a young woman who is on active duty right now learned just last week the man that assaulted her was given a letter of reprimand. This one fact allowed me to receive my VA compensation. One day I got a call from the CID I was asked to come to their office. When I arrived I was told that if I did not spy and find out who was stealing expensive signal equipment from my Battalion I would receive the same punishment as my

rapist. Reduced in rank to E-1, loss of 6 months pay, confined to the barracks for 6 months. I had a three year old child I had just fought to regain custody of after a nasty divorced that followed the rape. Since I had become a single parent I was able to exit the military on the basis of single parenthood or perhaps I would have been given a false diagnosis and been put out like so many I have heard about. Everything I learned in the Army until the day I was raped was we are team, we take care of each other, we depend on each other to be safe. What I saw then and what I see today is there is little justice for sexual assault victims. Since the day I was raped it has altered my life my mother and sisters became strangers to me. I was a stranger in my own skin. My children have been impacted. I had to have a hysterectomy at age 22 because of the venereal disease I contracted from that rape. Families are the hidden victims in these crimes.

The sad fact is so many of these rapes are committed by the same person. I know it was not the first time for the man who raped me. When little to no punishment is given they are emboldened to act again and again. The transient nature of the military also plays an important role in covering up these crimes. We can't wait another year or 5 years we need to act today. The military has proven time after time they will cover up a rape but throw the book at guy who takes a joy ride in a jeep.

These crimes show an intuitional failure at the highest level. No one will take responsibility for it they pass the buck with a false narrative that is as outdated as the rape laws of our county, our states, our colleges, and our military. Slowly things are changing but a couple of weeks ago our new Secretary of Defense said he was concerned that putting women into the Rangers, the best the army has, would put women in more danger of being raped. That leaves out the fact that 53% of the victims are men.

In the process of this project I heard so many stories that survivors could not bring themselves to write about. Everything from "it was an Afghan soldier" to "it was my husband who drugged me and brought his friends over to rape me". From the battle ground to the bedroom it is all a war zone for survivors.