Dear Senator Gillibrand,

I am writing to support the needed changes you propose in the Military Justice Improvement Act. I spent over 25 years on active duty in the United States Navy and had the privilege of serving as Commanding Officer, Naval Telecommunications Station, Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory, a position in which I was the court-martial Convening Authority for the almost 400 people who were part of my command. For the past 13 years, I have served as Director of the Women in the Military Project at the Women's Research & Education Institute (WREI). In both these capacities, I have closely watched the struggle of the U.S. military to halt sexual assault in its ranks for over 35 years.

During this entire time, military Convening Authorities have had the power to investigate, refer to courts-martial and make final disposition of all charges of sexual assault within their commands, and yet they have not made a dent in the problem. As a former Commanding Officer and Convening Authority, I completely understand the services' insistence that commanders must retain their authority to dispose of charges of sexual assault. However, as an advocate for military women—and men—it is crystal clear to me that too many commanders have betrayed the trust placed in them by their subordinates, their services and their fellow citizens because they have not used this authority properly. I have, therefore, come to the reluctant conclusion that that authority must be removed from the chain of command and placed in the hands of trained military prosecutors who can serve as unbiased, professional experts on the disposition of sexual assaults and other felony cases. This is critical to ending sexual assault in the military.

Thank you, Senator Gillibrand, for your strong leadership in this matter of deepest importance to our future national security.

Sincerely,

Lory Manning

Captain, USN (ret.)

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