

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

TESTIMONY ON HCR19/HR13 URGING THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND THE HAWAII OFFICE
OF VETERANS SERVICES TO DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF WOMEN
VETERANS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

BY

MR. RONALD P. HAN, JR.
DIRECTOR OF OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES

March 29, 2012

Chair Aquino, Vice Chair Cullen and Committee members:

I am Ron Han, Director of the Office of Veterans Services (OVS). I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of the concepts on House Concurrent Resolution 19/House Resolution 13.

In response to the Resolutions, the OVS has organized a Women's Military/Veterans Task Force committee to address the needs of our women veterans. In the near future, plans are being crafted in partnership with Veterans Affairs (VA), State, County and private agencies in having women's veterans issues shared on the national stage during the annual Women's Veterans Summit comprised of representatives from all 50 States and territories. Our neighbor islands are also looking at specific programs, like Homeless Female Veterans, and providing outreach to them with support from various Federal, State, private and non-profit agencies.

The OVS and VA recognizes the strong need to develop programs and to address pertinent issues affecting this fastest growing group of veterans.

We fully support these initiatives.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Hawaii's Veteran community.



Committee: Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
Hearing Date/Time: Thursday, March 29, 2012, 10:00 a.m.
Place: Room 309
Re: Testimony of the ACLU of Hawaii in Support of H.C.R. 19/ H.R. 13

Dear Chair Aquino and Members of the Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii ("ACLU of Hawaii") writes in support of H.C.R. 19/ H.R. 13.

Thousands of service members each year are estimated to have experienced some form of military sexual trauma (MST), including rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. These acts occur nearly twice as often within military ranks as they do within civilian society. Rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment are so prevalent in the military that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has coined a term to refer to these acts when perpetrated against servicemembers: "military sexual trauma" (MST).¹

In 2008, the VA found that more than 48,000 female veterans suffer from MST.² Yet, while one in three women are sexually assaulted during their service, the military has failed systematically to investigate complaints, appropriately punish perpetrators, and treat trauma and other health conditions suffered by survivors.³

Victims who report MST commonly face stigma and retribution. Superiors in the chain of command are charged with investigating reports and have little incentive to document assaults which could reflect poorly on leadership evaluations. In the end, only 8 percent of alleged perpetrators are prosecuted.⁴ After they leave the service, veterans face enormous obstacles in obtaining medical care and disability compensation connected to sexual assault. Please adopt S.C.R. 5/ S.R. 6 in defense of the women who defend us.

The mission of the ACLU of Hawaii is to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the U.S. and State Constitutions. The ACLU of Hawaii fulfills this through legislative, litigation, and public education programs statewide. The ACLU of Hawaii is a non-partisan and private non-

¹ See <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/military-sexual-trauma-general.asp>.

² See <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126783956>.

³ See <http://www.aclu.org/files/assets/2010-12-13-MSTFOIAComplaint.pdf>.

⁴ *Id.*

American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii
P.O. Box 3410
Honolulu, Hawaii 96801
T: 808.522-5900
F: 808.522-5909
E: office@acluhawaii.org
www.acluhawaii.org

Chair Espero, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
and Members Thereof

March 29, 2012

Page 2 of 2

profit organization that provides its services at no cost to the public and does not accept government funds. The ACLU of Hawaii has been serving Hawaii for over 45 years.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Laurie Temple
Staff Attorney

American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii
P.O. Box 3410
Honolulu, Hawaii 96801
T: 808.522-5900
F: 808.522-5909
E: office@acluhawaii.org
www.acluhawaii.org