



**SERVING  
WITH  
PRIDE**



---

**A M V E T S**

NATIONAL  
HEADQUARTERS  
4647 Forbes Boulevard  
Lanham, Maryland  
20706-4380  
TELEPHONE: 301-459-9600  
FAX: 301-459-7924  
E-MAIL: [amvets@amvets.org](mailto:amvets@amvets.org)

July 9, 2018

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
478 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Statement of Support for the Military Justice Improvement Act of 2017 (MJIA) (S-2141)

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

American Veterans (AMVETS), the most inclusive Congressionally chartered veteran service organization in the U.S., supports the enactment of the Military Justice Improvement Act of 2017 (S-2141). We believe passage of this law will lead to a more just process for victims of military sexual assault. The law calls for necessary changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) by removing from the accused's commander the authority to dispose of certain felony-level charges.

While commanders are necessarily given broad authority to maintain good order and discipline within their commands, violations involving sexual misconduct remain a problem in terms of prevalence and disposition. In too many cases, commanders have failed to properly investigate, prosecute, or review convictions of subordinates charged with UCMJ violations involving sexual misconduct.

This has created a sense of hopelessness for many service members who opt not to report sexual offenses because they fear retaliation from their peers and/or superiors and do not trust their commanders to make proper disposition of such charges. AMVETS believes that military JAG officers, instead of commanders who lack the prosecutorial training and experience to properly handle these cases, should be assigned the responsibility for their investigation and disposition.

AMVETS acknowledges and appreciates efforts undertaken to curtail military sexual assault and the public attention the problem now receives. However, those efforts have not resulted in a trend toward lowering the estimated number of sexual assault crimes. In May 2018, the Defense Department released its Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, which shows that service member reporting of sexual assault actually increased by about 10 percent in fiscal year 2017. This is a trend that must not continue.

Defense Secretary James N. Mattis said, "By its nature, sexual assault is one of the most destructive factors in building a mission-focused military." AMVETS wholeheartedly agrees, which is why we support this legislation. We thank you for sponsoring this important legislation and will implore your colleagues in Congress to support the passage of MJIA of 2017 (S-2141) as well, for the sake of our men and women in uniform whose focus should be on protecting our country, not themselves from sexual assault.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph R. Chenelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J" and a distinct "C".

Joseph R. Chenelly  
AMVETS National Executive Director