November 8, 2013

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the more than 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters of the American Association of University Women, I urge you to support amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (S. 1197) that will address the problem of sexual assault in the military and protect survivors. AAUW supports “freedom from violence and fear of violence in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities”1 which extends to freedom from sexual harassment and violence for women serving in the military.

Since its founding in 1881, AAUW has been breaking through barriers for women and girls. We applauded the military's decision to officially open combat positions to women. As our executive director, Linda Hallman, a proud nine-year veteran of the United States Army, wrote, “Women want to serve and have been serving in combat. We owe them recognition, equal treatment, and our full support.”2 The decision to open these combat positions to women is a reflection of military leadership recognizing the value of the critical skills women bring to our modern military workforce.

However, to maintain a strong military, we must address the problem of sexual harassment and violence all too common among women and men who seek to serve our country. AAUW strongly supports efforts to protect the rights of military service members and end the scourge of sexual assault and violence. We believe this issue must be addressed in a prompt, comprehensive, and sustained manner.

AAUW supports efforts that would take the prosecution, reporting, oversight, investigation and victim care of sexual assaults out of the hands of the normal chain of command and give this authority to an independent body. Many of America’s closest allies have already instituted similar reforms to address this issue. Further, AAUW supports proposals that would reform Article 32 proceedings to protect the rights of sexual assault survivors.

A recent Pentagon study estimated that 26,000 service members, male and female, were sexually assaulted in 2012, up from 19,000 in 2010.3 Other surveys of female veterans have found that close to a third were victims of rape or assault while they were serving, which is double the rate of the civilian population.4 Additional research by the VA has found that this problem even worse in conflict zones, with half of the women sent to Iraq or Afghanistan reporting being sexually harassed, and nearly one in four reporting sexual assault.5

This is unacceptable and must change. Through accountability, education, and a robust prosecution system, we can end sexual assault in the military.

Again, I urge you to support amendments to the Fiscal 2014 Defense Authorization (S. 1197) that will address the problem of military sexual assault and protect survivors. Co-sponsorship and votes associated with these issues may be included in the AAUW Action Fund
Congressional Voting Record for the 113th Congress. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Erin Prangley, associate director of government relations, at 202/785-7730, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President of Government Relations