

## PROTECT OUR DEFENDERS 2014 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter) MEDIA REPORT

Protect Our Defenders (POD) has hit the ground running in 2014. We have continued to reinforce our presence as the most vocal and active human rights organization for victims of rape and sexual assault in the military. We have done this through extensive media outreach, mobilizing our extensive survivor community, and advocating for fundamental reform in our nation's capital, and throughout the country.

Protect Our Defenders or our members have been featured in over **600 articles** and broadcast stories. These include pieces in all the major news outlets, The National Journal, New York Times, Wash Post, Vogue Magazine, ABC News World News Tonight, CBS News, CNN and many others. The issue has also become part of pop culture, as it was recently one of the main story lines in the hit TV show, *House of Cards*.

We continue to work with the media to break investigative reports that keep the issue of military sexual assault in the headlines and we influence public opinion by working closely with editorial boards.

### Associated Press Investigation

In early February 2014, the Associated Press released a four year investigative [report](#) revealing in shocking detail the military's flawed and insufficient handling of over 1,000 sex crimes that were reported by service members stationed in Japan between 2005 and 2013. **Protect Our Defenders worked with AP's reporters in DC and Japan for months to help break this story.**

Once the report came out, POD put out a [press release](#) responding to these new revelations. The release included statements from POD President Nancy Parrish, as well as veteran and **Advocacy Committee Member Stacey Thompson**. She participated in a press conference with Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) just prior to the story breaking that we helped organize. Stacey, who had been assaulted while based in Japan in the late '90s said the AP's investigation, "further exemplifies the need to implement a fair and impartial legal system. This pattern of sexual deviant behavior and crime within our military has and will continue to increase if congress does not act immediately to meaningfully change the system, which has overwhelmingly produced a fear of retaliation for so many victims of sexual assault."

### Vogue Magazine

The March issue of Vogue Magazine profiles Sen. Gillibrand's ongoing efforts to enact fundamental reform to the way the military handles sexual assault cases. **Protect Our Defenders was featured in the piece, along with two of POD's Advocacy Committee Members, Jessica Hives and Heather Pitcovich.** POD worked with award winning author Mimi Swartz to develop the story for almost a year, introducing her to Jessica and Heather. This was the first time that Heather shared her story publicly.



**From the article:**

*Pitcovich said she eventually agreed to meet the officer at a bar near her home. “When I asked who was going to be there, he named a bunch of other senior people,” she told me. Later that night, she awoke at her house with a vague memory of getting sick and needing to be taken home. As her head slowly cleared, she said, she realized she was naked, and the officer was on top of her. “I couldn’t move,” she said. “I was trying to process what was going on.” Pitcovich said it took her months to recall another detail from that evening: the men she had been with laughing at the far end of the bar while a round of drinks was prepared. She became convinced she’d been drugged. She said she filed a report, and eventually, after a contentious Article 32 hearing—a prerequisite to a military trial—negotiated an agreement with the defendant, who accepted nonjudicial punishment for sexual harassment and fraternization.*

**Senator Gillibrand Press Conference**

For the past year, Protect Our Defenders had been working with Stacey Thompson, a Marine Corps veteran and sexual assault survivor who up until last May, had never told her story publicly. In May 2013, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) held a press conference in Los Angeles to with Stacey and Protect Our Defenders discuss the Military Justice Improvement Act (MJIA) and the epidemic of sexual assault in military. Stacey joined Sen. Boxer and shared her story for the first time in a gripping account that was featured on the front page of Yahoo News and outlets around the world.

In 2014, Stacey has become an extremely active Advocacy Committee Member for Protect Our Defenders. In early February, Stacey joined Sen. Gillibrand, Sen. Boxer and Tailhook whistleblower and Protect Our Defenders Board of Directors Member Paula Coughlin at a [press conference](#) in Washington, DC.



At the event, Stacey called on Congress to pass the Military Justice Improvement Act. This conservative legislation would remove the decision to prosecute rape and sexual assault cases from a conflicted and often-biased chain of command, and put it into the hands of independent prosecutors.

#### Paula Coughlin's MJIA Petition

In March 2014 Protect Our Defenders launched a [petition on Causes.com from Paula Coughlin](#), calling for the Senate to give victims a vote, and not allow a couple of Senators to filibuster justice. In only a couple days, Paula's petition received **over 9,000 signatures**, from supporters who also called, tweeted and Facebooked the offices of Senator's who had yet to support the MJIA.

## **Protect Our Defenders Wins Veteran’s Organization of the Year**

Earlier this month, Protect Our Defenders received the [Veteran’s Organization of the Year award](#) from the California Democratic Party’s Veteran Caucus. Stacey Thompson accepted the award, and spoke on POD’s behalf at the awards ceremony. At the event, Stacey told the crowd, “as a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and survivor of military sexual trauma, I have decided to lend my voice for change. It wasn’t easy last year when I told my story publically for the first time, but the overwhelming support I’ve received from Protect our Defenders reassured me that I am not alone.”

Along with Stacey, other individuals connected with Protect Our Defenders received awards as well. Congresswoman and Honorary POD Chair Jackie Speier (D-CA) received the Caucus’ John F. Kennedy award for standing up for victims of sexual assault in Congress.

The Caucus also named Protect Our Defenders Advocacy Committee Member Kate Weber the 2013 California Veteran of the Year. Kate is a fierce advocate for victims of military sexual assault, and last year [joined Sen. Gillibrand](#) to call on Congress to support the MJIA. Kate has also [testified in front of the California State Assembly](#) on the issue of sexual assault in the military, and appeared in the Oscar nominated documentary, *The Invisible War*.



### **Vote On Military Justice Improvement Act**

In March 2014, the Military Justice Improvement Act did not receive enough votes to overcome a filibuster led by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), which would have created an independent and impartial military justice system for our service members. However, the bill had the support of 55 Senators and the majority of the American public.

While the defeat was heartbreaking, Protect Our Defenders made sure that we **were out in front on the media front** following the vote, appearing on national broadcast outlets, and in multiple newspaper publications.

POD Advocacy Committee Member, Veteran, and Founder of Women Veterans Social Justice, BriGette McCoy, was on **CNN's The Lead with Jake Tapper** directly following the vote. She [discussed the Senate's failure](#) to pass fundamental reform and spoke for thousands of survivors when she said Sen. McCaskill “betrayed” her by spearheading a filibuster that gave other Senators political cover to stand with the status quo. BriGette will also be featured as a keynote speaker at the [Inaugural Georgia Women Veterans Conference](#) in April that she is organizing.



Stacey Thompson also discussed the filibuster on [ABC World News Tonight with Diane Sawyer](#). She shared her personal experience with reporter Cecilia Vega, and why the reporting of sexual assault cases must be taken out of the chain of command. The newscast featured video from other survivors [profiled](#) on POD's website.



While we lost this Congressional battle due to political maneuverings, our organization is certain that it is only a matter of time before we see effective reforms put into place. We have since called on President Obama to [make good on his word](#), when he told every service member who has experienced sexual assault that he has their backs and will support them. Until this happens, this crisis that has affected tens of thousands of our brave men and women in uniform will continue unabated.

**We are also working on a series of new investigative stories with CNN, CBS' 60 minutes, GQ and others that will run in the coming months.**

Protect Our Defenders continues its work with survivors of military sexual assault and harassment, through our [Pro-Bono Legal Network](#). We collaborate with attorney Susan L. Burke, and work with a network of lawyers willing to assist rape and sexual assault survivors at no cost.

Our [Peer-to-Peer Support](#) program is also very active, connecting veterans and active duty service members who were raped, assaulted or harassed to peers who have been in their shoes and who can offer emotional support and information.

### **Social Media**

In addition to making sure the viewpoints of survivors are accurately reflected in the traditional media, Protect Our Defenders continues to organize advocacy through online campaigns to put pressure on our elected officials to investigate the epidemic of sexual assaults in our military and legislate fundamental reforms.

POD's Facebook page has nearly **13,000 'likes'** and is steadily growing. POD also has nearly **1,500** followers on Twitter — where we are constantly engaging with reporters, elected officials, and other prominent voices in the advocacy community.

We also have over **19,000 supporters** on Causes.com, the world's largest online campaigning platform.

Our advocacy will continue throughout 2014, as we work with survivors and the media, and encourage President Obama and more elected officials to support fundamental reform.

Last year, [President Obama told victims](#) of sexual assault in the military, "I want them to hear directly from their commander in chief that I've got their backs."

The time has come for the President to take meaningful steps to demonstrate his commitment to that promise.