

CONGRESSWOMAN  
CHELLIE PINGREE

1ST DISTRICT  
MAINE



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION AND HORTICULTURE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, ENERGY,  
AND FORESTRY

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND  
EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

October 13, 2011

The Honorable James R. Clapper  
Director of National Intelligence  
Washington, DC 20511

Dear Director Clapper,

Thank you for your commitment to the security of the United States. I write to request an amendment to Question 21 of the Standard Form (SF) 86, Questionnaire for National Security Positions.

As you know, in 2008, at the request of the Department of Defense, Question 21 of the SF 86 was changed to allow military members and veterans to answer "No" to the question if the reason for the counseling was strictly related to adjustments from service in a military combat environment. This policy change was an attempt to reduce the stigma attached to mental health counseling and the perception that it could threaten a career. While I am pleased that the question was changed regarding combat veterans, it has been brought to my attention that a large population of military members and veterans were excluded — victims of military sexual assault.

Unfortunately, sexual assault occurs all too often within the Department of Defense. I have been contacted by many victims of military sexual trauma (MST) who have told me that they fear answering "Yes" to Question 21 because it will ruin their careers or lead to the eventual denial of employment. As a result, many of these victims forgo mental health counseling. As the Department of Defense stated after the policy change regarding combat veterans, "Seeking professional care for these mental health issues should not be perceived to jeopardize an individual's security clearance. On the contrary, failure to seek care actually increases the likelihood that psychological distress could escalate to a more serious mental condition, which could preclude an individual from performing sensitive duties. Thus, we encourage you to seek care when necessary, knowing that getting professional assistance as needed is the best way to sustain one's ability to perform well." I strongly agree with that statement, and I sincerely hope you will give this request your most serious consideration.

I ask that you revise the language to make it clear that victims of military sexual assault can answer "No" to Question 21 if the counseling they received was because of the sexual assault they experienced.

Thank you for your service to the nation. I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chellie Pingree".

Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress