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Legislation seeks to aid military sexual assault victims

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U.S. Reps. **Mike Turner**, R-Beavercreek, and **Niki Tsongas**, D-Mass., introduced legislation Wednesday to expand legal rights and protections for service members who have been the victims of sexual assault.

The Defense Sexual Trauma Response, Oversight and Good Governance, or Defense STRONG, Act would provide victims with the right to legal counsel, base transfer and confidentiality when speaking with victim advocates, as well as provide greater training for sexual assault prevention and response throughout the armed services.

To bolster his case, Turner points to the case of Dayton-area native **Maria Lauterbach**, who was murdered by a colleague she accused of rape.

"(She) met a tragic end to her life because of a system which did not provide adequate protections for victims of sexual assault," said Turner, in a statement. "While our most recent efforts to make strides in combating sexual assault in the military have been positive; much work remains."

Turner and Tsongas also cite studies that as many as 1 in 3 women leaving military service report some form of sexual trauma and that as few as 13.5 percent of sexual assaults are reported.

The Defense STRONG Act builds upon provisions that Tsongas, Turner and their colleagues on the House Armed Services Committee were successful in including in last year's National Defense Authorization Act. The language required the Department of Defense to develop a comprehensive plan to address sexual assault prevention and response and submit it to Congress.

Turner and Tsongas are joined on legislation by eight original co-sponsors.

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