

December 18, 2005- Sanchez Statement on Passage of FY06 National Defense Authorization Bill

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"Mr. Speaker, let me start by adding my thanks to the Armed Services Committee staff for their hard work and long hours in getting this conference report to the floor.

"On the whole, I think this is a solid bill--a bill that does a lot of good for our servicemembers and their families. It raises basic pay and hardship duty pay. It provides TRICARE coverage for Reservists. It increases the death gratuity for all activated servicemembers. It begins the much-needed reform of the DOD acquisition system. And with the inclusion of the McCain language, this bill makes a strong statement to the world that the United States does NOT condone--and will not tolerate--the torture or abuse of detainees.

"But I'm particularly happy to note that the final conference agreement includes two important revisions to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). The first revision would update Article 120 of the UCMJ making it a modern, complete sexual assault statute that protects victims, empowers commanders and prosecutors, and improves good order and discipline of the armed forces. It offers military prosecutors a clear definition of sexual assault and better tools for prosecuting sexual offenses, and it affords increased protection for victims by emphasizing acts of the perpetrator rather than the reaction of the victim during an assault.

"The second revision to the UCMJ involves the addition of stalking as a specifically defined offense, bringing the UCMJ in line with federal laws and the laws of all 50 states. The language in this bill will offer commanders and prosecutors a clear definition of stalking. It will raise awareness, strengthen law enforcement, and underscore the criminality of this conduct to all members of the military community. Furthermore, it will give commanders a powerful tool to cut stalking off in its early stages--before a stalker's behavior escalates.

"I have pushed for these changes for a long, long time, and I am thrilled to see both chambers finally agree on these major steps forward for the military justice system and for the men and women of our armed forces."