

## **Military Lawyer Chad McFarland Discusses Military Sexual Assault Epidemic**

The sexual assaults of military personnel, that have been happening across the country, have apparently also been happening right here in our own backyard. On a day when the U.S. House of Representatives approved \$638 billion dollars in defense spending that includes money to punish military sex offenders, we're also learning about shocking allegations of abuse here in the Capital Region. Allegations of sexual abuse at the New York Air National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing, although disturbing, are not necessarily surprising. "It's probably safe to say that the incidences amongst our organization are probably not that dramatically different from any other population of young Americans," says Colonel Richard Goldenberg of the NY Air National Guard. He says what ever did or didn't happen on the base several years back, isn't being handled the same way today. A woman by the name of Sharon Dwyer Stepp, a Lieutenant Colonel who retired in 2010, is a former sexual assault prevention coordinator at the 109th, who recently wrote a letter to U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, telling him: I can tell you from my firsthand experiences in this position, the program is broke, the commanders do not protect the victims or allow any follow up medical assistance. She goes on to say "the perpetrators do not get punished, but instead are promoted." "This is not something that changes overnight. It changes over time," says Goldenberg. More money is being spent to educate and train military personnel up and down the chain of command. "The military does have a problem," says Chad McFarland, an attorney with Tully Rinckey in Albany, and a former military prosecutor who believes if the military takes the issue seriously, the trend can be reversed. "Females have been soldiers, airmen, marines, sailors and its not going to change. Somehow we'll have to have these institutions really enforce the common military values that are already there by holding those accountable who commit these offenses," he says. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand issued a statement on Friday, saying that Lieutenant Colonel Stepp's remarks are consistent with what we have heard over and over again from the victims, the chain of command is failing victims of sexual abuse. Senator Gillibrand goes on to say the nation must "embrace systemic reform required to increase accountability, objectivity, and trust in the military justice system."