



PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
NATIONAL MILITARY FAMILY ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION (NMFAO)

December 18, 2024

Advocating for Military Families: Addressing Systemic Barriers and Inequities

The military family is the foundation for members serving in harm's way worldwide. Tragically, some military families face abuse, abandonment, and systemic inequities. Change is desperately needed to protect and support these families. The National Military Family Advocacy Organization (NMFAO) is committed to advocating for these vulnerable individuals.

This issue is personal for our co-founder, vice president, and Congressional witness, Ms. Rohini Hughes, a domestic violence victim who, along with her son, Mr. Jay N. Hughes testified before the House Armed Services Committee in 2019 at the request of Hon. Congresswoman Jackie Speier. Since sharing their story of abuse and abandonment by her ex-husband (a military and civilian attorney), Ms. Hughes and her son have faced relentless legal retaliation to include a \$1.5 million defamation lawsuit after testifying in the public interest and as their First Amendment right, as domestic violence is a public health crisis.

As her ex-husband is an attorney in the VA/MD/DC area, on March 8, 2024, Hon. Chief Judge Penny S. Azcarete ordered recusal for all Fairfax County Circuit court, Virginia Judges prohibiting them from hearing this case due to a conflict of interest. However, Hon. Judge Jonathan D. Frieden, a Fairfax County Circuit Court, VA Judge who admitted to having cases with the Plaintiff, recently presided on this case. Ms. Hughes has been forced to challenge all legal issues as a Pro Se litigant, and her challenges were compounded when the Judge prohibited her and all her witnesses from appearing remotely—despite previously being permitted to do so and submitting a formal motion requesting this accommodation well in advance to the former Hon. Judge Paul Sheridan, who intimidated Ms. Hughes into disclosing her cancer. This decision created significant hardship as Ms. Hughes continues to battle terminal cancer while facing financial strains. Though Ms. Hughes has no opportunity for employment while her ex-husband continues to be fully employed as a civilian attorney and as an attorney in the Air Force Reserves, Hon. Judge Frieden recently made a judgment against Ms. Hughes for \$400,000, denying her remote appearance request, a trial by Jury removed twice after being permitted, violating the federal law for the American Disability Act (ADA) and her due process rights. The only thing Ms. Hughes and her son did was to testify to Congress by speaking absolute truth in the “Interest of Public and First Amendment Rights” about their story and the need for reform that will provide military families the assistance they need when in crisis.

This case highlights systemic barriers and inequities faced by domestic violence victims within the justice system, particularly with military families when Judges deny critical evidence from being admitted. Even after providing testimony before Congress, victims like Ms. Hughes and her children remain vulnerable to legal retaliation, underscoring the urgent need for stronger protections.

CALL TO ACTION: We urge concerned citizens to contact their local Congressman, and members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to advocate for reforms addressing these systemic inequities and ensuring justice for military families impacted by domestic violence. Victims must not be punished for reporting abuse, protecting themselves, and testifying absolute truth to Members of Congress.

To learn more about NMFAO, email us at info@NMFAO.org or press@NMFAO.org or www.nmfao.org. Messages of support for Ms. Hughes and her son, Jay Hughes can also be sent to the above email, and we will ensure they receive them.

National Military Family Advocacy Organization (NMFAO)

Protecting the rights of military families. Advocating for justice and change. We appreciate your time and consideration. May God continue to Bless the U.S.A.!