

**2014 National Center for Victims of Crime
National Training Institute, Plenary Speech
Miami, Florida
September 17, 2014**

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Good afternoon. Thank you, Mai [Fernandez] for the kind introduction. I speak for the entire Department of Defense when I say we appreciate all that your organization and others like yours do to help victims of crime. My name is Major General Jeff Snow and I serve as the Director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office at DoD. For those of you that are not familiar with our office, we serve as the single point of authority for oversight and accountability of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response in the Department.

I am honored to be here with you today to share our goals, our challenges, and our way forward as we work to eliminate sexual assault from the military, learn how to better respond to the needs of victims of crime, and engage with the experts in attendance.

There is no single effort that will eliminate sexual assault from the military. However, having said that, I do know one thing – collaboration with organizations like the National Center for Victims of Crime is crucial – and our ongoing relationship continues to positively impact our SAPR program. I am tracking 71 Service Members or Civilians associated with DoD are here to include one from my own organization – Jean Wertman.

As you can well imagine, this role is unlike any other I have had in my career. This particular issue strikes close to home with me. As the spouse of a Service member and the father of three kids – all at different stages in their lives – I have begun to use any opportunity to have a conversation about how to be safe and stay safe. We talk through what we can actually do to prevent sexual assault, like providing respect in dating relationships – and this goes for my two daughters as well as my son!

Like my predecessor, Major General Gary Patton, who spoke at this conference two years ago, I am committed to doing my part to eliminate sexual assault from our ranks. I can assure you that I approach this assignment like any other I have had as an Infantryman – with a commitment to ensuring that all Service members work in a safe and respectful environment. I am very fortunate to be supported by senior leaders and surrounded by a strong team that shares this commitment. Not only is this our mission, but it's clearly the right thing to do.

And, our best advocate in bringing critical urgency to this mission? Secretary Hagel. He has significantly elevated this issue – not just by ensuring senior leadership attention, but also by leaving no stone unturned as we work to enhance our prevention and response programs.

Since May 2013, he has directed 28 major initiatives which directly impact the entire military population. These directives are strategic and significant, and they were developed to

improve specific issues, like: the quality of our investigations, how commanders are held accountable for the environment in their individual units, and how to enhance the military justice process.

As these initiatives are implemented across the Services, they help us align and strengthen our SAPR programs, by elevating promising practices to a common standard throughout the Department.

In short, our prevention and response program today is vastly different than it was just two years ago. We continue to learn more about sexual assault and take deliberate, meaningful actions to prevent the crime before it happens and empower victims and facilitate recovery when it does.

As you know, in both the civilian and the military sectors of our society, sexual assault is among the least reported of crimes. And so the focus of many of our reforms has been to increase victim trust and confidence in the services we offer so that more victims are willing to report and can engage in restorative care. A recent initiative fielded throughout the Department provides sexual assault victims free legal counsel from their own, impartial military attorney. We implemented this capability in January and now have more than 185 of these special victim counselors or SVC's fielded across the armed forces.

This started as a promising pilot program in the Air Force – and through the Secretary's direction, it became a force-wide policy. Our SVC program is just one way we are working to ensure that victims of sexual assault know their rights and understand the military justice system.

We also want everyone to know that a report of sexual assault can be independent of the chain of command. In fact, our response system provides multiple reporting methods that are *outside the chain of command*. When a victim does take the difficult step to come forward, there are victim advocates, health care professionals, and sexual assault nurse examiners on the front lines of every location that can provide confidential care. And just to be clear, our policy specifically prevents commanders from conducting investigations, leaving that work to specially-trained military investigators – who are outside the chain of command.

Over the past few years, we have dedicated significant attention, manpower, and resources to making our programs stronger. We continue to strive toward a system that: (1) ensures every report of sexual assault is completely and thoroughly investigated, (2) holds offenders appropriately accountable, and (3) supports victims throughout the process. Our certification program for Response Coordinators and Victim Advocates further engages military leadership in the recovery process, and communicates to Service members that they have access to professional, trained, and certified SAPR advocates. More than 25,000 advocates have met national certification standards, which as you know, represents a significant resource for military victims.

We are empowering commanders and leaders to establish environments that are intolerant of the destructive behaviors that lead to sexual assault. We are working to make sure that leaders at

every level understand how to identify signs of victimization and harmful behavior within their units – and what to do when they see it. And things are beginning to change.

Last year, filed reports of sexual assault increased dramatically – from 3,300 reports in 2012 to just over 5,000 in 2013. This 50 percent increase happened over the course of a single year and quite simply means that more sexual assault victims came forward to access help through the military’s response system. To put that into context, we had only seen reports go up about 5 percent each year since 2006.

So, why the dramatic increase of victims coming forward to seek help? I have to believe that we are seeing a growing level of confidence in our response system. In fact, we continue to see more and more reports made by victims about incidents that took place prior to joining the military, which tells us that our message is getting through and that our response system is viewed as a path to recovery for some. Without a doubt, the most important outcome of increased reporting is that survivors of sexual assault are recovering with the help of others. They are not alone.

While the increase in reporting is encouraging, we know it represents only a small step in our mission to protect all who serve from sexual assault and reduce the prevalence of this crime. In the end, our progress can only be measured by the future decisions of Service members to step up and intervene in the face of harmful behavior. That is why it is so important to lay the framework now to prevent these crimes from occurring in the future. And, that is precisely what we are doing - intensifying the Department’s mission to prevent sexual assault.

This past May, Secretary Hagel directed that each Service implement an updated Sexual Assault Prevention Strategy. We knew a one-size-fits-all approach simply does not exist, so we developed a roadmap that is intensely focused on shaping the environment where Service members live and work. Prevention is much, much more than an hour of training, an awareness campaign, or an inspiring poster. Instead, it requires ongoing dialogue at all levels to reinforce our values and stress what it means to be a Solider, Sailor, Airman, or Marine.

To realize this vision, we collaborated with a host of organizations and experts to evaluate current prevention programs and ongoing research – and we capitalized on best practices from around the country. We also were able to develop an invaluable partnership with the folks at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – better known as the CDC.

For our framework, we adopted a prevention model employed and endorsed by the CDC, called the social ecological model. It advocates prevention and intervention at every level of society based on the everyday influences on a person’s values, attitudes, and behaviors. Public health and safety organizations around the world employ similar models to combat preventable disease and educate the public on many other health related issues.

Our model differs somewhat, because we can add an additional element: ‘leaders.’ The military identifies and empowers leaders at all levels to reach Service members at the individual level. The military is structured in a way that leaders – specifically commanders – are the center of gravity in the unit and they are an instrumental force in setting the tone and climate.

We know sexual assault occurs in environments where offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual harassment are tolerated. And our approach places a high level of responsibility on commanders to be proactive in identifying and rooting out these behaviors.

We are arming commanders with information, tools, and tactics they can use to prevent sexual assault and misconduct in their units. It is critical that our leaders are empowered to establish and sustain a healthy command climate, and we are working to ensure accountability of their progress.

As an example, command climate surveys are administered to monitor and track the health of every operating environment. And last year, Secretary Hagel directed that the results of those annual surveys be provided to the next level in the chain of command, which allows commanders to proactively assess real threats that can impact the unit and use the data to address shortcomings.

And, as an added layer of oversight, we are now assessing all commanders in their ability to set the right climate and adhere to sexual assault prevention and response practices in their yearly evaluations.

I want to make it clear, that when I talk about leaders, I am not just talking about the small percentage of commanders who have the authority to refer a sexual assault case to court-martial. I am talking about the vast majority of the men and women that I have worked with over the years. Everyone in the military is – at the least – a leader in training and everyone has a role. It doesn't matter who you are – we expect everyone to conform to the values we live by as military professionals.

The bottom line is we expect leaders to be more involved in the solution, not less involved. We are laying the framework now to prevent crimes in the future – and leaders are an essential piece for mission success. Just this last summer, the Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel released its report recommending a number of improvements to our policies and programs. However, this body agreed that military leadership should remain at the core of military justice process.

As we embark on the prevention campaign and continue to implement meaningful actions, I sense how critical our role is in combatting this crime. We are in a unique position to lead change on this issue and we embrace this opportunity.

In the military, it's different because we can direct and enforce far-reaching policy changes. We can combat this crime with a comprehensive and synchronized effort to ensure the entire Department is aligned. And we can leverage the center of gravity in our organization – our commanders – to enforce the standards we set.

My message to those commanders and the force at large is clear. We don't care who you are or what grade you hold. If you don't understand our core values and are not prepared to live and enforce those values every day, then we don't want you in our military. The majority of my peers feel precisely the same way.

We're in a unique position to lead change because we have the full weight of the Department of Defense on this issue. Since 2011, the Services have worked to implement 41 initiatives directed by the Secretary of Defense, both Secretary Hagel and his predecessor, Secretary Panetta. These reforms range from reviewing alcohol policies, ensuring a victim can be reassigned away from an alleged offender, aligning our Code of Military Justice with the federal civilian Crime Victims' Rights Act, improving our response for male victims, and elevating oversight of each case to the first flag or general officer-level commander.

As independent actions, each directive required a heavy lift. Taken together, I can report a fundamental change to the way the Department deals with this crime. The attention and commitment of senior leaders to execute these orders has led to greater oversight of each and every segment of our response system.

We have more than just our senior leaders and a growing awareness in the field helping to combat sexual assault. There are a wide-range of stakeholders at the table, including our partners in Congress. We appreciate the ongoing dialogue on Capitol Hill as we continue to work to improve our program. In fact, implementation of the last 3 defense bills includes 53 sections of law that contain more than 100 provisions and increase our congressional reporting requirements. Last year alone provided the most sweeping changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice since 1968.

We are nowhere near declaring success in the battle against sexual assault, but I will tell you we are making great strides and others are noticing. If you haven't already seen the White House's Campus Sexual Assault Task Force Report, I would encourage you to do so. The Task Force is leading change through this remarkable effort which is going to have a profound impact on our entire U.S. society. Many of the recommendations made by the Task Force, including professional advocacy, confidential reporting, and surveying for prevalence, the DoD has been doing for years.

I know we have a long way to go, but we are all in this together. We are all dealing with a difficult and misunderstood crime that takes a severe emotional toll on human beings. Our mission is not easy and there will continue to be good days and bad. But I am encouraged by the commitment from our leaders and the dedication of our people. We will remain proactive and prevention focused with an uncompromising commitment to victim care. The men and women of our United States Armed Forces deserve nothing less.

It has truly been a pleasure to speak to you today. I admire your selfless attitudes and dedication to helping victims heal and recover. Thank you.