

**End Violence Against Women International
Conference on Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence and Stalking
Plenary Session
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The Invisible War: A Military Response

Thank you for the kind introduction and also for moderating this panel. It is a great honor to be here with you all today and I must say it is very inspiring, standing before such a large audience of victim service professionals. I want to thank you for being the first responders, the professionals on the front lines, caring for victims of crimes and prosecuting the offenders. It is important and tireless work, and requires passion and skills unique to your profession; and our American citizens need you.

I also want to thank Joanne Archambault and the good people leading this organization. Thank you for your leadership and commitment in the national effort in preventing and responding to violent crime.

It is also an honor to share the stage with my friends and colleagues—Claudia, Russ, David, and Carolyn. In my nine months as Director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, I have had the pleasure to work with and learn from these experts.

I was asked to speak today about the Department of Defense's response to the documentary, "The Invisible War." My job is to position the military to win the war on sexual assault, and I believe it can't be won until it's made more visible to all our Service members. The documentary has certainly helped increase this visibility. I serve as the Director of SAPRO, the Department's office that oversees the establishment and implementation of sexual assault policy. We recognize sexual assault is a terrible crime, and we know that more needs to be done in combating it. Today I will explain what we're doing on multiple fronts to make this a very visible war against sexual assault.

Let me begin by stating that it has been my honor to serve our nation in the US Army for more than thirty-three years. I am no stranger to leading culture change. I have helped destigmatize mental health care for our combat veterans, more fully integrated women into the armed forces with the 2012 Department's Women in Service Report, and I managed DoD's repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.' The common denominator in all these complex institutional challenges

has been an unequivocal commitment to mission success, readiness of the force, and the welfare of our men and women in uniform.

Sexual assault has no place in my Army and my military; it is an affront to the values that we defend and it erodes the cohesion our units demand. It is unacceptable that each year, more than 3,000 male and female Service members report some form of unwanted sexual contact—from abusive sexual contact to rape. We estimate that many more go unreported. As in the civilian society, we have significant underreporting of this crime. Underreporting complicates the issue and prevents victims from receiving the care they need, and limits our ability to investigate and hold offenders appropriately accountable.

At the Department of Defense, we are taking a multi-disciplinary approach to combating sexual assault. We are leveraging a wide range of initiatives and engaging every Service member to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place. However, when one does occur, we want effective processes to be in place and expert people on hand to support victims and ensure delivery of justice.

Our DoD-wide mission is to prevent and respond to this crime in order to enable military readiness and to reduce—with a goal to eliminate—sexual assault from our military. To accomplish this, we are organizing our strategy along five lines of effort: Prevention, Investigation, Accountability, Victim Advocacy, and Assessment.

Let me give you a quick overview and highlight some key initiatives in each of these lines of effort—the first being **Prevention**. Our goal is to harness the energy of the entire military community to prevent criminal behavior from occurring in the first place. We have evaluated and are standardizing every sexual assault prevention and response training course our Services offer to commanders, senior enlisted noncommissioned officers, our newest enlisted troops and the Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Victim Advocates. We are incorporating the best practices in sexual assault training, and making them common practices across the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. And each Service has launched enhanced training programs. This new training uses interactive, adult learning techniques such as role-playing scenarios and features direct messages from our most senior leaders, underscoring our military core values and stressing the importance of creating a culture free from sexist behavior, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

In the **Investigation** line of effort, our goal is to achieve high competence in every criminal investigation of sexual assault. By DoD Policy, investigations are conducted entirely independent from the military chain of command, and not by commanders. When an unrestricted report of sexual assault is filed, it is automatically referred for investigation to a professionally-trained Military Criminal Investigative Organization. We have updated the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Kit to align evidence collection with national standards. We have implemented a policy to keep investigative documentation for 50 years in unrestricted reports should the victim so desire. And

finally, we are creating a Special Victims Capability in each of our Services that will deliver a distinct group of professionals who provide enhanced victim support and a capability to investigate and prosecute sexual offenses, as well as child abuse and serious domestic violence, and ultimately yield greater accountability of offenders.

So this Capability is also closely tied to our next line of effort – **Accountability**, in which our goal is to hold offenders appropriately accountable in the military justice system. In January, the Air Force launched a new pilot program—Special Victim’s Counsel—that provides legal representation to victims of sexual assault. The Special Victim’s Counsel is expected to improve victim confidence and enhance reporting, and lessons learned from the pilot will inform how the rest of the Department proceeds in this area. And in June of last year, the Secretary of Defense elevated the initial disposition decision for the most serious sexual assault offenses—including rape, sexual assault, forcible sodomy, and attempts to commit these offenses—so that, at a minimum, these cases are addressed by a special Court Marital Convening Authority who is an officer at the Colonel or Navy Captain level or above. Elevating the disposition authority ensures that the disposition decision for these cases are made by experienced commanders with the advice and counsel of Judge Advocates General, and also keeps these cases within the chain of command.

While there are many people who work to ensure accountability among our troops, Commanders have a particularly important role in our military justice system. Our leaders must retain responsibility and accountability for the problem of sexual assault. By providing them the tools and the authority to first establish and then enforce standards of behavior, commanders can address misconduct, punish offenders, and protect the health and welfare of all assigned Service members. Preventing and responding to sexual assault should be no different from another crime or offense. It is my view that removing disciplinary authorities from a commander’s purview would jeopardize the good order and discipline of the unit, and impact unit readiness.

Our next line of effort is **Advocacy**, with the goal to standardize and deliver effective victim support, response, and reporting options. Because sexual assault is such an underreported crime, it is imperative that our program inspires victim confidence and motivate victim reporting—a necessary bridge to greater victim care and increased offender accountability.

Last year we implemented policy that provides for an expedited transfer for victims. This past October we launched a Certification Program for Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Victim Advocates in alignment with national standards to be completed by October this year. We expanded emergency care and support services to DoD civilians stationed abroad and US citizen DoD contractors in combat areas. We have expanded the DoD Safe Helpline to help transitioning service members who have experienced sexual assault, and next week, we will launch a new peer support feature on the Safe Helpline—the Safe HelpRoom. The Safe HelpRoom is a group chat service that allows sexual assault survivors in the military to connect with and support one another in a moderated and secure online environment. And to ensure policy making is informed by the voices of victims, I routinely meet with sexual assault survivors, gaining their perspective

on command climate, victim advocacy services, reporting, and other aspects of sexual assault policy. In all our advocacy efforts, we endeavor to provide effective victim care, so that we instill confidence, restore resilience, and inspire more victims to report.

Our final line of effort, **Assessment**, is an enduring process of data collection and analytics designed to improve program effectiveness. As part of our assessment efforts, we utilize a wide range of surveys and reports to collect, review, and act upon valuable feedback from Service members, commanders, victims, and victim advocates. Our goal is to incorporate responsive, meaningful, and accurate systems of measurement and evaluation into every aspect of our programs. We have increased the frequency of Department-wide surveys, and we have placed sexual assault prevention and response questions on the climate surveys available to Commanders. Administered in the tens of thousands each month, these climate assessments provide invaluable feedback to Commanders on the climate in the unit, effectiveness of sexual assault prevention training, and barriers to reporting within individual units.

The Department is close to publishing a revised DoD-wide sexual assault strategy that will codify the five lines of effort I just outlined. Underpinning our strategy for preventing and responding to sexual assault is the need for enduring culture change. Culture change requires our leaders at all levels, from top to bottom, to foster a command climate where sexist behaviors, sexual harassment, and sexual assault are not tolerated, condoned, or ignored.

A climate where dignity and respect are core values we must all live by and define how we treat one another. A climate where a victim's report is taken seriously, their privacy is protected, and they are treated with sensitivity. A climate where bystanders are trained and motivated to intervene and prevent unsafe behaviors. And finally, a climate where offenders know they will be found and held appropriately accountable for their actions.

The Department is firmly committed to changing our culture and combating sexual assault. I believe we can turn this around. As we have seen with past culture changes in our military, such as racism and drug/alcohol abuse, culture change starts at the top. And right now I can assure you we have unprecedented senior and mid-level leader attention and energy right now on sexual assault prevention and response programs. The key is transferring this energy and focus from top to bottom, across the Force, through continued quality training and strong leadership.

I want you all to know that your US Armed Forces remains persistent in confronting this crime. This month, we recognize Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. But, like you, we are working every month to make the invisible war a visible one. And with you and your support, we intend to make the U.S. military a national leader in sexual assault prevention and response.