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An All-Fronts Battle Against Sexual Violence: A Vital Military Campaign

Thank you, Mai, for your kind introduction. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is my 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 the good people leading the National Center for Victims of Crime for inviting me here today. Mark Mandell, Mai Fernandez, Jeff Dion, and Susan Smith Howley: thank you for your leadership and commitment to this worthy cause.

It is also an honor to share the stage with my friend and colleague, Major General Dunbar. We have worked together on a wide variety of military personnel issues, such as the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Women in Service policy changes, and sexual assault prevention. And so it is nice to see you here today Sharon, and thank you for your remarks. They underscore the importance of what we're doing together in the battle against sexual assault.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me begin my simply stating we have a problem of sexual assault in the US military, and there is no denying it. I do not come here today, nor do I talk to any reporter, or anyone on Capitol Hill or in the halls of the Pentagon, and try to minimize what we're facing. The Department of Defense has done anonymous surveys that estimate that over 19,000 Service members experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact in 2010. And far fewer—about 2,700 victims—have reported these incidents. While that 19,000 estimate has come down from an estimate of 34,000 in 2006, we are not even close to where it needs to be. Recognizing this is a national problem, not just a military one...One sexual assault is too many, and that is why we are engaged in a military campaign to reduce and the goal of eliminating sexual assault from our military.

As you heard in the introduction, or may have read in the program, my current job is the Director of SAPRO—with responsibility to oversee the implementation of this campaign against sexual assault. The overarching principle of this campaign is that sexual assault is a terrible, repugnant crime; it is an affront to the values we defend and the unit cohesion we demand in the Department of Defense.

When a Service member sexually assaults a fellow Service member, it is a failure of the core values that define our profession of arms. Worse, the individual who commits a sexual assault violates a sacred trust that bonds every man and woman, brothers and sisters in uniform. Sexual Assault is clearly a readiness issue, with each crime potentially eroding a unit's cohesion and weakening its readiness and ability to accomplish its mission. In the military, we define sexual assault as intentional sexual contact characterized by the use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent. The term includes a broad category of sexual offenses consisting of the following specific UCMJ offenses: rape, sexual assault, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, forcible sodomy, or attempts to commit these offenses.

And when I think of sexual assault in my Army, I also think of the future. I think of my daughters, in or about to go off to college. They are the same age as the young men and women enlisting to serve our country or entering our Military Academies. They enlist knowing the inherent harms and hazards of military service, especially while still deployed in Operation Enduring Freedom, but they should not have to live or serve in an environment where they fear unwanted touching or a sexual attack by their fellow service member. Not in my Army...not in my military!

Our campaign against sexual assault is vital to maintaining the strength of our Armed Forces. And it will require a culture change. A culture in each Service- Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines- and within every Unit and Command, where sexual assault and sexual harassment are not tolerated, condoned, or ignored. A culture where bystanders act to intervene and stop unsafe behavior, thereby potentially preventing sexual assaults from happening in the first place. A culture where offenders know they will be held accountable --where they can be certain they will be found and punished for committing these crimes. And, A culture of trust with the victims— where they have faith in the system, and feel confident that they will be taken care of, their privacy will be protected, and their report will be taken seriously, where they know that their unit and chain of command stands behind them.

So how are we going to do this? Well, there is no silver bullet. Any solution will require persistent and simultaneous efforts in multiple areas. For the remainder of my presentation, I would like to describe our current campaign, which is organized along five “lines of effort” or fronts: Prevention, Investigation, Accountability, Advocacy, and Assessment.

Prevention. The first front is prevention. Effective prevention efforts reduce environmental risks, predatory and high risk behaviors, and reduces personal vulnerabilities associated with sexual assaults, the majority of which we see occurring in the barracks and during social activities involving alcohol consumption among our young service members—peers or near peers, not strangers. Effective Prevention involves heightened awareness education, and training programs that promote dignity and respect, personal responsibility, and the empowerment to act as a bystander.

There are two pieces of our Prevention Effort:

- 1. Training.** Each of our services have recently launched revamped training programs, aimed at educating on things like consent, and training on bystander intervention. The same principle of taking care of your battle buddy on the battlefield applies off the battlefield in defending an unsafe situation—be it drinking, drugs, or sex. We are evaluating our sexual assault prevention and response training programs across the Services to make “best practices” into common practices. Right now we are closely examining basic training and training for officers selected for Command. A training priority is that within 14 days of entrance to active duty, sexual assault policies are explained to all new recruits.
- 2. We are conducting command climate surveys within 120 days of assuming command, and annually as appropriate.** Climate surveys are designed to help commanders identify attitudes and practices within their unit, such as the presence of sexual harassment or other misconduct, and overall knowledge about the SAPR program, and then inform corrective actions within their commands.

Investigation. Our second front is investigation. A sexual assault investigation begins with a report and continues until all available facts and evidence is gathered, analyzed, and the case is submitted to a commander for action. It is important to note that these investigations are independent of the military chain of command to guarantee they are free from the pressure of command influence.

- 1. In April, Secretary Panetta announced the establishment of a Special Victims Capability within each Service.** This capability will reside in each Service, and will bring together specially trained investigators, prosecutors, and victim/witness personnel to collaborate on sexual assault cases. While the Services have some of this Special Victims Capability already, the Secretary’s initiative emphasizes the synergy brought about by common training, regular cooperation, and information sharing. The DoD is funding joint training over the next five years for investigators and attorneys to ensure that we have the right expertise at the right time and at the right place.

Accountability. Accountability is our third of the five fronts, and encompasses those actions specific to adjudicating an alleged sexual assault crime, taking into account the safety of the victim; due process rights of the accused; and taking the appropriate action based on the facts of a case in conjunction with legal counsel. Within the limits of a military commanders' authorities, they may dispose of an alleged offense by forwarding court-martial charges, imposing non-judicial punishment, applying administrative action, or take no action when appropriate. **Our goal is to hold perpetrators appropriately accountable.**

1. **On the Accountability front, Secretary Panetta recently elevated the initial disposition authority for sexual assaults.** Under military law, the accused's immediate commander has traditionally been the decision authority for disciplinary action. However, these cases are oftentimes complex, so that they are best handled by more mature and senior leaders who are farther up the chain of command. This change now ensures that rape, sexual assault, and forcible sodomy cases are handled by more senior commanders higher in the chain of command who have greater experience with legal counsel and disciplinary issues.

Advocacy. Our fourth front is central to everything we do—victim advocacy—and encompasses actions involving response, protection and care for victims, from the initiation of a report through case disposition in the justice system to victim recovery. In this area, we have learned a lot from you, our colleagues in civilian victim advocacy, such as the fact that successful advocacy begins with the care provider and that placing the most qualified and best trained professionals into these advocacy positions is essential. There are five advocacy programs and new initiatives to point out:

1. **Reporting Options: In 2004, we established two reporting options—restricted and unrestricted—recognizing that the best way to ensure our victims get the recovery services they need is by encouraging them to report the assault in a way that is best for them.** Two types of reports: Restricted Reports allow sexual assault victims to confidentially disclose the assault to specified individuals (i.e., SARC, SAPR VA, or healthcare personnel), and receive medical treatment, including emergency care, counseling, and assignment of a SARC and SAPR VA, without triggering an official investigation. Many victims want to retain strict confidentiality concerning their assault. The Restricted reporting option allows victims this level of confidentiality. An Unrestricted Report allows sexual assault victims to access care, the command is notified, and the sexual assault is reported to law enforcement to initiate the official investigative process. Since we introduced the dual reporting options in 2004, we have seen a 75% unrestricted and 25% restricted breakdown for all reports, our sexual assault reports have increased by 88%. That is, we had 88% more reports in Fiscal Year

2011 than we did in 2004. This means more victims getting the care and counseling they need.

2. **Access to Services/Safe Helpline. Sexual Assault Response Coordinators or Victim Advocates are present at every installation and in every command around the world. They are our front line responders, like you. Even still, we need to improve victims' access to information and services.** In 2011, we established the Safe Helpline, a crisis support service staffed 24/7 to provide live, confidential, anonymous, and security assistance worldwide. Victims can call, chat online, or text message and reach a person to talk to for emotional support, for referrals to military and civilian resources, and to help understand reporting options. We continue expanding this capability, and recently introduced a Mobile App for smartphone users. Since our launch in February 2011, we have had over 62,000 unique visitors to our website. We have provided personal assistance or information to nearly 5,300 people.
3. **Expedited Transfers: In December Last year, the DoD created a new policy that gives victims who file an unrestricted report the right to request an expedited transfer from their current unit of assignment.** This affords a victim the ability to transfer from one assignment to a different location, thereby helping a victim begin the process of healing in a new environment, which is devoid of any immediate stressors and triggers that may be present in victim's current environment.
4. **Extended Document Retention:** December last year, we put in place a policy that extends the time records pertaining to sexual assault are maintained by the Department of Defense. For Unrestricted Reports, sexual assault records and documentation such as the DoD Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) Report, will be retained for 50 years, and for Restricted Reports documentation will be kept for 5 years. Extending the retention periods for sexual assault records ensures victims have access to their files after they leave Service or in the event they change their mind about requesting an investigation.
5. **Certification Program: We have established a Certification program for our Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Victim Advocates, and will launch the program by the end of this month.** Every DoD victim advocate will apply for certification by the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA). Certification will be based on an assessment of each applicant's training, experience, professional ethics and command references. We worked with NOVA in modeling this program after civilian advocacy credentialing programs, so that it meets national standards, and so that it raises the level of victim confidence in the advocacy process.

Our fifth and final front is **Assessment**. This is an enduring process of data collection, analytics and assessments designed to improve program effectiveness and is embedded within each of the four lines of effort. It includes valuable feedback from Service members in the form of surveys and also includes feedback from commanders, victims, and victim advocates.

One initiative in the area of assessment is our new database. We need to know with pinpoint precision what exactly we're dealing with. To help us better collect, analyze and report sexual assault case information, we developed the Defense Sexual Assault Incident Database – or DSAID. In fact, all four Services will be using DSAID by the end of this month. For the first time, all the Services will be reporting and managing their cases in a similar way, ensuring improved case management and trend analysis.

In closing, the US military is no stranger to tough tasks. Two to three years ago, I was involved in building and training the Afghan Army—challenged by 80% illiteracy and historic corruption. Last year, I was involved in the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, requiring new and accepted openness on sexual orientation for our 2.3 million Service Members. Today, we face sexual assault.

I am very excited by the prospects of all these initiatives and new programs, and am mindful we must remain persistent along all these five fronts I've described to you today.

Please know, we will reach out to you as tackle the complexities of this horrible crime. Thank you for helping us get this right. With me today are Bette Stebbins, our Senior Victim Assistance Advisor, and Major Matthew Youngblood, our Military Victim Assistance Advisor. If you would like to talk with them, learn more about what we're doing, or give us some insight into your success stories, please come talk with them. We welcome the discussion, and look forward to learning from you.

Again, I want to salute your efforts and I look forward to your questions and discussion.