

OPENING STATEMENT
OF
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SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES: SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

HEARING:
"SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY"
MARCH 13, 2013

Madame Chair Gillibrand, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear today. First, I would like to thank the sexual assault survivors who testified earlier today. I appreciate their personal courage in standing up and speaking out. Their words inspire our efforts and renew our commitment every day.

It has been my honor to serve our nation with Service members like them over the past thirty-three and a half years.

I am no stranger to leading culture change, to include helping de-stigmatize mental health care for our combat veterans, more fully integrating women into the armed forces with the 2012 Department's Women in Service Report, and managing the Department's successful 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.

Now as the Director of the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office for the past nine months, I want to say the Department recognizes sexual assault is a terrible crime and more needs to be done in combating it. It is a national problem in our society, but we in the military must hold ourselves to a higher standard. 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 19,000 men and women Service members in 2010 are estimated to have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact. This estimate is based on feedback from a Department of Defense anonymous survey of the active duty force. That same year, just over 2,600 victims of sexual assault, took the difficult step of coming forward and making an official report of these crimes, ranging from rape to abusive sexual contact. This number, when compared to the survey estimates, demonstrates the significant underreporting of

this crime. This underreporting prevents victims from receiving the care they need, and it limits our ability to investigate these crimes and hold offenders appropriately accountable.

As this reporting problem demonstrates, sexual assault is a complex issue. And there is no single, “silver bullet” solution. 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. Reducing and eliminating sexual assault requires a multi-pronged approach—one that leverages a wide range of initiatives and engages every Service member to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place. But when one does occur, effective processes and expert people must be in place to support victims and ensure delivery of justice.

Underpinning all our efforts is the need for enduring culture change – requiring leaders at all levels to foster a command climate from top to bottom 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; where a victim’s report is taken seriously, their privacy is protected, and they are treated with sensitivity; 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. These climate factors are being stressed and taught today at multiple levels of NCO and officer education and training, and we are getting positive feedback from this training.

I often get asked how we will know when this culture change has taken hold. My answer relates back to some of my formative experiences growing up in the Army spanning the past 5 decades: I believe we will know change has occurred when prevention of sexual assault is as closely scrutinized as prevention of a fratricide – or friendly fire. We will know change has occurred when sexist behavior and derogatory language produce the same viscerally offensive reaction as hearing a racist slur. We are not there yet, but we are heading in the right direction and we need to remain persistent in moving this forward.

The Department’s multi-disciplinary strategy is organized along five lines of effort: Prevention, Investigation, Accountability, Victim Advocacy, and Assessment. All five are described in detail in my written statement, submitted for the record. In the interest of time, I will conclude my oral statement with a few personal observations:

I firmly believe we can turn this around, but it will take time and continued emphasis on all five lines of effort and at all levels. Culture change starts at the top. I see unprecedented senior and mid-level leader attention and energy right now on SAPR programs across the Services. The key is transferring this energy and focus from top to bottom, across the Force, through quality training and strong leadership.

I began my remarks by stating that sexual assault is a national problem. I will conclude by stating that it is my view that the Department of Defense can and must be a leader in solving this problem for America. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your questions.