

STATEMENT

OF

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PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

READINESS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL

HEARING ON

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PROGRAMS

AT THE MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMIES

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Introduction

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, and military personnel subcommittee members – Thank you very much for having us here today to discuss the results of the DoD Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies for Academic Program Year 2015-2016.

The Department is committed to promoting an environment where all Service members are treated with dignity and respect. Sexual assault and sexual harassment have no place in our Armed Forces. These repugnant behaviors affect our people's well-being, and they undermine the overall readiness of the military. These behaviors are inconsistent with our core values and the expectations of the American people. They are issues that continue to receive a great deal of attention from senior leadership in the Department -- and they are front and center with me in my current role.

I began performing the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness in January. Prior to this role, I spent the last five years leading our workplace and gender relations survey and focus group efforts, both at the Academies and in the military force at large.

I mention this for two reasons.

First, from this experience, I am intimately familiar with the methodology used to gather data, the results, and the implications of the findings in the report we are here to talk about today.

Second, as I just mentioned, I understand the impact sexual assault has on our people, force readiness, and the Services' ability to carry out our national military

strategy. Just one instance of sexual assault, harassment, or sexualized misconduct can send ripples through a unit and distract its people from their mission.

Preventing criminal behavior and misconduct, providing care for Service members, and holding offenders appropriately accountable continues to be a top priority among our Department leaders. In the force at large, we have seen some significant progress over the past several years on our key indicators of progress. Sexual assault is occurring less often and the crime is being reported more frequently. All military installations – including the Academies - have a host of support services and restorative care options. However, one of the things we have learned since creating the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program in 2005 is that context and environment matter. The right combination of mission, people, and environment can produce a great deal of progress in combatting these problems. Sometimes, however, our approach must be tailored to take into account unique subcultures and environments. There is no “one size fits all” solution to the problem of sexual assault. This is not just our observation, but one also acknowledged by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in their recommendations on preventing sexual violence.

Our Military Service Academies are held in high regard by the American people and by other colleges and universities, not just because of the quality of education they provide, but also because of their attention to leadership and character development. Each of you have nominated young women and men to the Academies, knowing that in doing so your nominee has the opportunity for a great education, personal growth, and service to our country as a leader. This indeed is the experience for the vast majority of students at the Military Service Academies.

The Department's assessment of the Military Service Academies for this past academic year affirms this. We found substantive evidence of the Academy leaderships' continued efforts in promoting a safe environment for all cadets and midshipmen and providing first-class support services for victims. We are encouraged by the continued engagement we see from leaders on this issue and the involvement at the student-level. In fact, the Military Service Academies' efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assault reflect much of the Department's progress in this mission space. However, effective prevention practices continue to be a challenging goal for the Academies and the Military Services alike. Unfortunately, rates of unwanted sexual contact increased at all three Academies during this academic program year, returning to levels commensurate with what we observed in 2010 and 2012. In addition, while the trend line over the past several years indicates that reporting of sexual assault has increased, reporting at the Academies has not echoed the large increases we have seen throughout the active force since 2013. Finally, the experience of sexual harassment is far too common at the Academies – with nearly half of women and over ten percent of men surveyed indicating they have experienced behaviors inconsistent with the dignity and respect we require from our future leaders.

As I stated before, approaches to address sexual assault and sexual harassment must be tailored to the specific needs of the environment in which they are to be employed. Academies differ from the active force because they are educational institutions. They are an officer accession source, admitting people new to each Military Service and teaching them to be leaders. In addition, there is a completely new mix of cadets and midshipmen every four years, and the men and women joining our

Academies are at a critical point in their development, with regard to maturity, judgment, and individuation. This is perhaps our greatest opportunity for growth.

While there have been improvements at the Academies over the past ten years, our efforts to improve prevention and reporting have not made the gains we'd all like to see. That is not for lack of effort and attention. All three Superintendents and their leadership teams speak regularly on this topic to their cadets and midshipmen. In fact, our surveys indicate that the majority of cadets and midshipmen trust the Academies to protect victim privacy, ensure victim safety, and treat victims with dignity and respect. In addition, the vast majority of cadets and midshipmen indicate that commissioned officers and senior enlisted leaders at the Academies set good examples in their own behavior and talk.

Each of the Academies has developed some benchmark practices. For example, the US Military Academy has incorporated sexual harassment and assault prevention and response into their Character Development Curriculum, known as their Gold Book. They have placed emphasis on their peer leadership program to deliver many of the lessons in this curriculum. At the US Naval Academy, they invested in a program to enhance the skills and abilities of peer leaders in Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education – or SHAPE. Midshipmen in SHAPE must audition and learn how to lead small group discussions on topics such as prevention, consent, and healthy relationships. At the US Air Force Academy, the Athletic Director initiated a program to employ athletes as positive role models. Representatives from his staff and the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program hold small group discussions with sports teams' members, emphasizing the importance of respect in relationships and how to

actively intervene to prevent sexual assault. Each of the Superintendents here today will go into greater detail about their efforts.

Going forward, we must place greater emphasis on these and other evidence-based prevention programs that are designed to make a lasting impact. We are confident that we can do more to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academies, through an approach that considers the full spectrum of readiness-impacting behaviors. Many of the readiness impacting behaviors can be prevented by encouraging Service members to be more involved in each other's lives and the cadets and midshipman can benefit particularly at the student leadership level. We must help them recognize warning signs with their peers, and empower them to take steps to protect and help each other when they notice something that isn't right. However, this is not something that can be immediately achieved with policies. It can only be achieved through a unified effort to help our cadets and midshipmen understand the duty they have to each other in all aspects of their behavior. Our society emphasizes the freedom of the individual. Our fighting force depends upon the strength of the military unit. Ultimately, this change in putting service before self, is the culture change we require of everyone wishing to join our ranks. We must become more involved in each other's lives if we are to learn how to treat each other with dignity and respect – and have a military culture free from sexual assault and harassment.

In closing, I and other senior leaders throughout the Department are committed to creating the safest and most supportive learning environment possible at the Military Service Academies. We will not stop until we get this right. We appreciate your concern and support as we work to protect the people who volunteer to keep our nation safe.