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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

STATEMENT OF  
VICE ADMIRAL WALTER E. CARTER JR, USN,  
SUPERINTENDENT OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON  
MILITARY PERSONNEL  
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Madam Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Kelly, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the United States Naval Academy (USNA). The Naval Academy's mission is to develop midshipmen morally, mentally and physically and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor and loyalty in order to graduate leaders who are dedicated to a career of naval service. A central theme to the moral development aspect of this mission is instilling into these young men and women, who come to the Naval Academy from across the nation, to always treat others with dignity and respect. Unfortunately, despite dedicated efforts by Naval Academy faculty, staff, coaches and the Brigade of Midshipmen, the Brigade continues to experience incidents of unwanted sexual contact (USC) within its ranks. The 2018 Service Academy Gender Relations (SAGR) survey, taken by the Brigade in April of 2018, indicates that the prevalence of USC experienced by Naval Academy female midshipmen trended upward slightly when compared to rates measured in 2016. This is certainly not the result we were striving to achieve. I have been at the helm of this institution for almost five years. I, and the rest of the Naval Academy leadership team, have actively sought out professional advice from the experts, both inside and outside the Department, on the best strategies and tactics to employ to reduce this scourge within our student body. We have made some productive improvements, but *we must do better*. We feel more responsible than ever not only to ensure that every member of the Brigade of Midshipmen can flourish in an environment of dignity and respect, but to prepare them to better lead sailors and marines in the fleet that come directly from that society we are entrusted to protect.

## **Our Prevention Program Must Holistically Address all Influences on Midshipmen**

The Naval Academy remains committed to an effective Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program that seeks to sustain a professional environment of trust and mutual respect free of retaliation against victims or others who report sexual assault. Our approach addresses the diverse cultural and societal influences on our midshipmen by executing DoD, Navy, and USNA directives and by collaborating with national, state, and local resources. Leadership engagement at all levels, combined with a focus on individual accountability, are the keys to successfully achieving our goal of significantly reducing incidences of USC; and we continue to work hard towards this goal. We continue to emphasize to our midshipmen that they are accountable for their actions 24/7—whether in military uniform or civilian attire—as ambassadors of the Naval Academy, the Navy, and decent upstanding citizens in our great United States, which will better prepare them for success in the Fleet.

A successful prevention effort at the Naval Academy requires a comprehensive approach from admission through graduation. Our prevention program includes screening potential midshipman candidates, a robust education and training program, a focus on responsible alcohol use, and a system that provides a visible deterrent to unacceptable behavior.

### *Pre-admission Screening*

Our admissions process not only examines the academic standing, physical fitness, and leadership experience of over 16,000 applicants each year, but also assesses their character. We rely heavily on required teacher recommendations, which can reveal character challenges. Additionally, we conduct police record checks on all candidates offered an appointment. Should we identify a promising candidate with a potential character challenge, we convene a character

review board to assess their fitness for admission. Incidents of proven sexual harassment or sexual assault are considered disqualifying. Going forward, we will continue to emphasize the importance of upstanding character in our admissions process.

### *Education and Training Program*

Our mission to shape these young leaders starts on day one – Induction Day – and continues through their senior year capstone event. Even though experts profess that successful prevention education programs must start years before students enter college, that in no way diminishes our efforts to develop these young men and women, representing a cross section of America – both geographically and culturally, into officers of the United State Navy and Marine Corps. The stakes are high for us to get it right in a span of just 47 months, but we have embraced the challenge.

The strength of our prevention program lies in the midshipman-led Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education (SHAPE) program. We still believe, and research shows, that peer-to-peer mentorship with sufficient Naval Academy leadership oversight is the most effective way to instill midshipman ownership of their collective actions throughout the Brigade. We have made headway in reaching influential groups of midshipmen that sway the Brigade's actions. We learned from the 2017 focus groups administered by OPA that varsity athletes, extra-curricular clubs and sports, and peer groups comprised of company friends exert a great deal of influence on the everyday actions and decisions of midshipmen. The SAGR survey reported that nearly two-thirds of midshipmen indicate that the training they received in the past year had increased their confidence in recognizing warning signs for sexual assault and intervening to help prevent sexual assault – an indication we are on the right path.

While our sexual harassment and assault prevention program earned the Navy's 2018 Excellence in Primary Prevention Award for our SHAPE program's peer-led, innovative approach targeting high-risk, college-aged students, it fell short in demonstrating any marked advance in changing midshipman actions and positive decisions that would prevent incidents of USC.

Within the last year, we updated all of our guest speakers, responding to direct feedback we received from midshipmen and staff concerning the SHAPE program. And while we are in compliance with all the latest prevention practices proven to be effective throughout the country, and continue to alter the curriculum to adapt to the rapidly changing environment, last month we launched an effort with the DoD-sponsored company, *Alteristic*, to help us improve our programs. We remain more committed than ever to changing attitudes and beliefs that influence midshipmen to make better decisions and take positive, deliberate actions to prevent incidents of sexual assault.

Our midshipmen are not immune to societal influences and we must continue to address the risks of engaging in activities online and in social media. These technologies risk negatively distorting norms on healthy relationships, privacy, and consent. In the past year, the Naval Academy launched a cross-campus, inter-disciplinary evaluation of the entire four-year leadership curriculum and pulled together all the themes addressing life skills. The team focused on the topics of making responsible alcohol choices, preventing incidents of sexual assault, enhancing a culture of respect, and improving sexual assault and sexual harassment reporting. Together, the team of educators, chaplains, and members of SAPR staff, Commandant Staff, and the Midshipman Development Center ensured all curricula contained common language and consistent messages. In addition to publishing the [Life Skills Handbook](#), these efforts resulted in

more closely aligning all programs across the training continuum, and we are optimistic they will better educate midshipmen in prevention practices.

Finally, while we have made improvements to our sexual harassment training, the survey results indicate that this training has not positively affected incidents of sexual harassment within the Brigade. We are currently collaborating with the *RAND Corporation*, as a part of their "Getting to Outcomes" initiative with the DoD, to yield more positive improvements. They have already begun assisting us in a two-year assessment of our Alcohol and Drug Education, Sexual Assault, Equal Opportunity and Sexual Harassment programs for the Brigade.

#### *Responsible Use of Alcohol*

The influence of alcohol remains a significant contributor to our incidents of sexual assault, with 72% of female midshipman USC events involving alcohol. Over the past year, the Naval Academy launched several initiatives to promote responsible alcohol choices:

- The Commandant's Alcohol Working Group developed a formalized training plan with specific objectives for each year-group.
- Broadened opportunities for supervised unit-level social events.
- At the midshipman-level, implemented the "Guardian Angel" program in which peers help each other return safely to the Naval Academy if alcohol is consumed while on liberty.
- Expanded existing training efforts, including company-level, scenario-based training entitled, "Midnight Teachable Moments," and expanded the "Keep What You've Earned" campaign, which employs individuals negatively affected by alcohol as an example and resource to educate midshipmen.

The majority of these efforts to instill more responsible alcohol use were put into effect after the most recent SAGR survey. For this past fall semester, we experienced a significant decrease (49%) in alcohol related incidents. Given the strong correlation between alcohol use and USC at the Naval Academy, we are optimistic that this recent improvement in responsible alcohol use will lead to decreased incidents of USC.

#### *Holding Perpetrators Appropriately Accountable*

While our education and training program does a good job of teaching our students the difference between right and wrong, for many individuals in the age group we are addressing, clear accountability is a key aspect of prevention.

The Naval Academy remains dedicated to promptly investigating reports of sexual harassment and sexual assault by utilizing all available resources to yield timely and accurate results. All complaints of sexual harassment are investigated and handled at the appropriate level including informal and formal counseling, letters of instruction (LOI), developing and giving sexual harassment training, adjudication through the midshipman conduct system which may include dismissal from the Naval Academy, and Dignity and Respect Remediation (a multi-month intensive one-on-one remediation with a Senior Officer).

Every Unrestricted Report of USC is referred to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). NCIS provides exemplary support in sexual assault cases and is committed to completing all investigations within 90 days of initiation. Coordination between NCIS, legal staff, and SAPR Victim Advocates (VA) has been critical to ensuring prompt and just results in each case, and we remain committed to improving the process wherever possible. Investigative findings are reported to me, the convening authority, for determination of disposition. I remain

committed to upholding the military justice process to ensure due process for the accused and the opportunity for justice system participation and closure for the victim.

### **A Strong Response Program Remains Vital to Assisting our Survivors**

Trust is essential to ensuring our midshipmen continue to reach out and receive help, and we work hard to build and preserve that trust. We remain committed to a 24-hour response, seven days a week, should support be required. The response efforts demand a coordinated effort across many departments influencing all aspects of midshipman life. The Naval Academy has a robust response team that includes Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARC) responsible for overseeing the entire response program, a cadre of fully certified VAs to support our midshipmen, a Victim Legal Counsel (VLC) who advocates for victims in all investigations and legal proceedings, the Brigade Medical Unit that works closely with the rest of the response team for care of victims residing in Bancroft Hall, a team of eight Chaplains fully trained as SAPR responders who work closely with SARCs, Medical, VLC, and the chain-of-command to provide support and guidance to victims throughout the process, and the Midshipman Development Center that includes a full-time civilian sexual trauma specialist who conducts individual counseling sessions as well as voluntary support groups for both female and male survivors of sexual assault.

Our Leave of Absence (LOA) policy continues to offer victims the chance to concentrate on healing at home and the opportunity to subsequently return to the Brigade up to a year later to resume the curriculum where they left off. It has proven to be a successful option among some



of our midshipmen. Since initiating the LOA program in 2015, we have had 12 midshipmen take advantage of the program.

We must continue to gain and maintain the trust of our midshipmen. Our mission is to produce the best officers for commission in the United States Navy and Marine Corps. We are fully committed to assisting our survivors in achieving their goals to serve. Since Academic Program Year (APY) 2014-15, of the 102 midshipmen who have filed a Restricted or Unrestricted Report, 84% either have graduated or remain members of the Brigade in solid standing. While we continue to enact efforts to decrease the rates of USC through prevention, support to those who require resources remains a vital endeavor that we will never fail to provide.

## **Conclusion**

Mrs. Chairwoman, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for your time and attention to this very important topic. The Naval Academy remains fully committed to eradicating this problem within our ranks, but we are facing continued societal challenges. Our fighting force reflects the culture from which it came and the society it has sworn to protect, so we will not stop working hard to sustain positive change at our institution to produce leaders of tomorrow. Over the past year, and since the 2018 SAGR survey was conducted, we have implemented many changes to our prevention program...and our initial assessments, especially as they relate to responsible alcohol use, appear promising. My team and I have learned more from this most recent survey and continue to reach out to experts in the field as well as other educational institutions for best practices. In April, the Naval Academy will host a national discussion on sexual assault and sexual harassment at civilian colleges, universities, and the

Military Service Academies, where we hope to develop more results-oriented solutions. We will continue to refine our program where we see opportunities for additional improvement. I remain fully committed to producing the highest caliber officers for the Navy and Marine Corps. That effort includes producing leaders that not only treat others with dignity and respect, but also demands the same standard from others in the military and civilian communities in which they serve and lead. There is no finish line in this endeavor. I am prepared to address any questions you may have regarding my testimony.