

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE

Prepared Statement

of

Dr. Elizabeth P. Van Winkle

Executive Director

Office of Force Resiliency

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness)

Regarding

Military Service Academies' Action Plans to Address the Results of Sexual Assault and
Violence Report at the Military Service Academies

12 February 2019

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE

Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Kelly, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee – Thank you for having me here today to discuss the results of the DoD Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies.

Two years ago I sat before you, on behalf of the Secretary of Defense and the military members I serve, and pledged we would do more to end sexual assault at our Academies. Two years ago I told you how we were committed to promoting an environment where all are treated with dignity and respect, and I vowed we would work to reinvigorate our approaches toward prevention of sexual misconduct, alcohol misuse, and other destructive behaviors.

I meant what I said, yet I sit before you and deliver news too similar to what I reported two years ago – sexual assault is on the rise again at our Academies. While each of the Academies developed and implemented action plans that were not yet fully in place for the current assessment, Department leadership was not complacent waiting for implementation, and therefore, another increase in rates is simply unacceptable. Preventing criminal behavior and other misconduct, providing care for Service members, and holding offenders appropriately accountable have been, and continue to be, top priorities. And yet, our most recent data indicates we have far to go to eliminate this abhorrent crime.

It is incredibly disheartening to be sitting here again to deliver this most unwelcome report. Our data tells us that rates of unwanted sexual contact increased by varying degrees across the Academies – and all too high. Rates of sexual *harassment* also varied among the Academies, but are also unacceptably high – particularly among women. And while some of the initiatives to increase the *reporting* of these crimes

brought about the desired impact of students feeling more empowered to come forward and report – our overall rates for reporting allegations of sexual assault are still far below the Active Duty rate.

The data also indicated that, across the three Academies, a large majority of cadets and midshipmen think their senior leaders are making honest and reasonable efforts to address these behaviors. However, these same students rate the efforts of their peer leaders much lower, and additional data showed declining rates for cadets and midshipmen watching out for each other to prevent these crimes, and for their willingness to point out if someone crosses the line. This tells us that – despite our hard work – some cadets and midshipmen still feel empowered to disrespect and victimize others. And equally challenging, there are some who feel neither empowered nor responsible in their daily peer interactions to hold each other accountable.

The vast majority of cadets and midshipmen are good people and will become the strong leaders our nation needs. Yet we must show them how to leverage their moral courage to create an environment where all can serve with dignity and respect.

The strategies we have employed have not shown the progress we intended. This is not due to a lack of dedication, commitment, or creativity. Our lack of progress is rooted in the complexities of trying to rapidly change culture as it relates to sexual misconduct. There is no single fix for this. We cannot blame our way out. We cannot train our way out. The Department, Congress, and our Nation as a whole have been challenged to crack the code on how to change behavior regarding sexual misconduct. It is a national and a global issue for which we all seek solutions. Our society must continue to evolve its culture to value integrity, character, and respect above sexual power and sexual predation. And as the Department of Defense, we are the ones who

have been entrusted by this country to lead the way. We must lead, and we are working to do just that.

Consequently, we will change our approach. What we have done in the past may not be abandoned, but we must determine what needs to be done differently, what needs to be adjusted, and what needs to be implemented anew. We are analyzing the breadth of data we have, and we will continue to partner and collaborate with other experts in this field who have found strategies in small subpopulations that show promise.

We know the Services are focused on promoting dignity and respect throughout our Armed Forces, including our Service Academies. And they will use the information from this year's report to help shape this focus, and continue their efforts in eliminating sexual misconduct.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense sets overarching policy for sexual assault prevention and response. In support of the Services, we will be fully engaged and will use our summer on-site visits to assess progress and provide technical assistance. And we have already taken steps. We have hired prevention specialists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to inform our efforts and assessments. We will provide additional reporting options available throughout the Armed Forces, but geared towards the unique concerns of cadets and midshipmen and aimed to address repeat offenders. We will refocus our efforts to look at the full lifecycle of the cadets and midshipmen, from selection through graduation, and work to target our approaches accordingly. Our focus will be on employing our resources in the right combinations, at the right times, in the right places, in order to not only achieve progress, but sustain it over time.

I am optimistic our new direction will render intended results and I sit before you today frustrated, but resolved. I have been working in this field for over 20 years. Ten in the civilian sector and nearly ten with the military. I left the civilian sector because I felt I was spending too much of my time fighting a system that seemed impervious to influence. I am committed to stay with the Department of Defense because I have the support of my leadership and because I have witnessed our system make changes over the past decade to produce an infrastructure of policies, programs, and processes that are not found in the civilian sector and have benefited our military members. We are not there yet, but we ARE committed.

To be clear, no one has solved this. If there were a singular solution to eliminate sexual assault, we would have done it already. We are fighting a normalization of disrespect that is bigger than any one of us, but it is an issue we must address. We are experts at behavior change. We take individuals and mold them. We instill courage where there may have been none. We impart discipline where there may have otherwise been disorder. We create lethal global warriors from young women and men who may never have even left their local communities. Eliminating sexual misconduct from the ranks remains a challenge, but one that we refuse to run from. We will not tolerate it and 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. Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak with you today. I look forward to your questions.
