

NOT PUBLIC UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
OF
MS LISA EAFFALDANO
PREVENTION AND CLINICAL ASSISTANT BRANCH HEAD
MANPOWER & RESERVE AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
ON
MAY 25, 2021

NOT PUBLIC UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Introduction

Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Gallagher, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss domestic abuse prevention and response efforts within the Marine Corps.

Marines are the foundation of our Corps. Since our founding in 1775, Marines have answered the Nation's call, faithfully serving the American people and maintaining a high standard of military excellence. Marines will be always faithful to the trust which the American people have vested in them. We, in turn, must always be faithful to them. We accomplish this by taking care of Marines and their families. An important part of this responsibility is helping to provide a safe home environment.

Overview

Prevention of any kind of domestic abuse and ensuring victim safety are top priorities for the Marine Corps. Domestic abuse is a complex issue. The programs and services in place to prevent and address domestic abuse are diverse. The Marine Corps Family Advocacy Program (FAP) is specifically designed to combat all domestic abuse and is even stronger when working in collaboration with others. The Marine Corps is dedicated to decreasing the incidents of domestic abuse through the use of research supported prevention strategies.

GAO Report

Domestic Abuse is a serious and important issue that requires our focused attention in the military. The Marine Corps was actively engaged with the GAO reviewers throughout the Domestic Abuse review and concurs with the findings and recommendations published in the final report. The GAO report provided 32 recommendations to the Department of Defense

(DoD) and four were specific to the Marine Corps. We concurred with the four recommendations and have requested closure of three as “complete”. We are actively working with installation FAPs to implement the fourth and request closure from the GAO. We remain actively engaged to ensure our actions remain consistent to the intent of the recommendations and to decrease the risk and occurrence of child abuse, domestic abuse, and problematic sexual behaviors in children and youth within our program. We will also continue to work alongside DoD and the other services to support the other GAO recommendations.

Family Advocacy Program (FAP)

In 2000, the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence was established by Congress to review and evaluate programs and policies associated with domestic abuse in the military. The Marine Corps was part of the initial working groups created in April 2000 to address identified concerns of Community Collaboration, Education and Training, Offender Accountability, and Victim Safety. Since that time, the Marine Corps has committed valuable resources and services for victims, as well as alleged abusers, who seek to end domestic abuse in military families. FAP aims to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect, domestic abuse, and problematic sexual behavior in children and youth involving military families.

The Marine Corps is taking an integrated and coordinated approach to prevention to build skills and resources needed to promote positive behaviors and reduce problematic behaviors such as domestic and child abuse, suicide, substance misuse, and sexual assault and harassment. The goal is to integrate prevention efforts across programs by building skills to promote protective factors and positive behaviors. Efforts are framed across four lines of effort: skill building, communication, collaboration, and application of data and research.

The Marine Corps knows that effective primary prevention cannot be done in a vacuum and requires extensive collaboration. As a result, efforts are ongoing with program staff within the Marine Corps, the other services, the National Guard Bureau, and the community both on and off of the installations. The majority of our Marines and families live in the community and we believe there is significant importance in engaging with professionals who are not military-affiliated. The Marine Corps is working diligently to identify and develop this newest element of the primary prevention workforce to promote integration across programs and connect installation assets and tenant command assets. This ensures that Marines and their families have access to primary prevention skill building regardless of where they are stationed, and that leadership understands the importance of, and encourages, skill building to promote protective factors and prevent problematic behaviors.

Prevention and Education

The FAP Prevention and Education services are designed to prevent child abuse and domestic abuse by improving family and individual functioning using a community-wide education and awareness approach. Focus is on teaching risk factors that could contribute to family violence. This is done through a multitude of classes, outreach programs, and command involvement to reach those in need before a situation becomes problematic. Easing stressors that can aggravate or trigger patterns of abusive behavior and creating community and command awareness of abuse are vital in mitigating the risk of abuse. The FAP utilizes a variety of communication strategies to normalize ongoing self-evaluation of relationship behaviors and to encourage early self-referral.

The FAP utilizes evidence-based and informed programming, to include classes such as *Century Anger Management*, *Coping With Work and Family Stress*, and *Warrior Maintenance*:

Stress Management for Marines and Families. Each course focuses on enhancing coping skills, mitigating risks factors that could contribute to stressors, and promoting healthy stress management. Courses provide a chance for Marines and families to recognize that abuse can take many forms and may impact multiple lives directly and indirectly.

We provide support for unit training and develop FAP content in Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training, community education, and a variety of other services upon request. Marine Corps FAP provides Incident Determination Committee (IDC) Training, which is an administrative process to determine if an incident meets the DoD criteria for abuse. Marine Corps FAP also provides training to all commanders. This training focuses on the prevention of domestic abuse and child abuse, commanders' responsibilities, FAP services, and local resources.

FAP Prevention and Education programs assist in training a number of base programs on domestic abuse and child abuse to include the Provost Marshal Office and Child Development Centers (CDCs). The training includes topics such as awareness of family abuse and services available; stress; communication; parent-child relationships; marital enrichment; anger management; and other topics relevant to overall family wellness. There is a Domestic Violence 24-hour helpline for those who find themselves in need of immediate assistance; it is available to every Marine and eligible family member and connects callers with FAP staff.

The New Parent Support Program (NPSP) provides education and support to Marine families who are expecting or raising children through age five. NPSP Home Visitors assist Marines and families with their concerns as a parent-to-be or parent in the privacy of their own home or other preferred location. Home Visitors provide education and classes, including Baby

Boot Camp, which are designed to teach the basic skills necessary to provide newborn care.

Group parenting classes enhance parents' understanding of child development.

The goal of the NPSP is to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors to build healthy families from the start, thereby reducing the likelihood of abusive parenting behaviors. The program uses the Protective Factors Framework to build parental resilience and social connections, increase knowledge of parenting and child development, provide concrete support in times of need, and improve understanding of the social and emotional competence of children.

The FAP clinicians provide clinical services to victims and alleged abusers to ensure the safety of the victim and community and to prevent future domestic abuse. Program offerings include trauma-informed assessment, trauma informed non-medical counseling, advocacy, case management, and supportive services. The FAP collaborates with Marine Corps unit leadership, Chaplains, Substance Abuse Program, Community Counseling Program, other Marine & Family programs, Navy Medicine, and off-installation community partners to ensure a continuum of care for Marines and their families and to mitigate risk and offer support after an incident.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges on how to provide FAP services for victims who were unable to come into the office. While this was always a concern, COVID-19 provided the additional push to quickly develop solutions. The Marine Corps immediately expanded services to victims and alleged abusers by offering office, telephonic and virtual platform options. As a result, services were not interrupted. We continued to offer NPSP, victim advocacy, intake and assessment, and individual, couple, family, and group sessions; our FAP 24/7 Helpline remained available and processing of transitional compensation for abused dependents was not impacted.

Overall, the Marine Corps' service utilization during COVID-19 has remained stable. Many of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic with relation to domestic abuse may be forthcoming, so we remain vigilant in assessing our program and the service data for patterns and stand ready to seek and implement new ways to help our victims of domestic abuse during this challenging time.

Community Outreach, Awareness, & MDT

Domestic abuse impacts all members of the military community, to include very young children, adolescents, and intimate partners. A key FAP prevention strategy is public awareness. Educating adolescents, parents, and service members is critical to help build and sustain healthy intimate relationships, as is fostering community dialogue and promotion of the use of available resources. All eligible Service members and their families have access to educational tools, non-medical counseling, and referrals to military or civilian resources.

Since 1981, October is recognized as National Domestic Violence Prevention Month with the purpose of raising awareness of domestic violence and providing the community with education on available resources. Installation Marine Corps FAPs host events throughout the month. The intent of the events is to increase community cohesiveness, mutual trust, willingness to intervene, coordination of resources, and services among community agencies, which help decrease risk factors for domestic abuse. These events also highlight available services, promote help seeking behaviors, and decrease stigma around accessing FAP services.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month (CAPM) and was first established by Presidential proclamation in 1983. CAPM is a time to acknowledge the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse. The 2021 CAPM campaign theme was

All In to End Child Abuse. Installation FAPs hosted events throughout the month aimed at increasing community awareness and promoting service availability. Activities promoted positive parenting, a decrease social isolation amongst our families, and provided opportunities for parents and children to have positive interactions. Community involvement decreases the risk of child abuse. FAP and NPSP partner with CDCs, schools, and other military and civilian programs to highlight the importance of a positive and caring adult in the life of a child.

Conclusion

All domestic abuse is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. No member of a family should have to deal with an unsafe environment; it is detrimental to the Service member, their Family, and to the Marine Corps. We must create a community where seeking resources and support are normal actions that Marines and families take. This is the ultimate goal of your Marine Corps FAP.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.