

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL
RELEASED BY THE HOUSE
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT OF
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(MANPOWER, PERSONNEL, TRAINING AND EDUCATION)
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES OF THE MILITARY SERVICES
MARCH 21, 2017**

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Introduction

Thank you Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, for this opportunity to discuss recent events. The military has felt the sting of disappointment from multiple reports of unprofessional and totally inappropriate behavior by some of our service members. Despite repeated efforts to end harassment and cyber bullying in our ranks, this intolerable behavior still exists.

There is no room in our Navy for this toxic behavior and we are aggressively going after it. It makes us weaker, erodes trust within our team, and cedes advantage to the enemy. We are committed to eradicating this behavior and mindset from our force. The United States Navy is a professional force, and the American people expect us to maintain high standards. We expect better of ourselves.

In a personal message last week to all Navy commanders, the Chief of Naval Operations stressed that "...we have a problem that we really need to solve, we are not going to put a Band-Aid on it, whitewash over it, or look the other way." He emphasized that, "The discovery of online sites that degrade members of our team has shined a light on the fact that this problem persists. But we get daily reminders of it, when individuals are disrespected by crude jokes, wisecracks, sexual harassment, and in its worst manifestation, sexual assault – a serious violent crime. Despite a steady effort to get after this, we're not making enough progress."

While it is common to hear that "these actions are being taken by only a small minority," this is an unacceptable answer. This demeaning activity is utterly offensive and we cannot let ourselves be tainted by a pathetic few who do not share our values of honor, courage and commitment. We cannot allow these individuals to cause divisions in our teams. When we fight, we depend on each other with our lives. We trust the person to our left and right to have our back. There are no bystanders. Everyone must be engaged to win.

Tolerating vulgar comments from our peers, subordinates or seniors gives others the impression that we condone that behavior or might go easy on someone who does. We must get past the inability to speak out and not let fear of acceptance ruin us. Those who thought they could behave this way with anonymity or without consequence will find out they are flat wrong. This is an issue of the ideals of dignity and respect *and* warfighting readiness - we *will* continue to investigate and take action as appropriate.

This type of behavior is not who we are. I cannot stress enough that Navy is going after this behavior and it is not a one-and-done review. Rather, a comprehensive strategy underpins our efforts. We will not tolerate this in our ranks. Nor will we tolerate cowardice in the dark shadows of the internet.

Current Social Media Policies

Our social media policies mirror our general policy, in that any form of harassment, discrimination, or hazing, online or otherwise, is not tolerated, and is inconsistent with our core values. This policy provides commanders with mechanisms to administer judicial or non-judicial punishment as appropriate. Behaviors that rise to the level of sexual harassment, whether conducted person-to-person, online, or by any other method, are covered under this policy.

We have developed several training products, to include Social Media Handbooks for Ombudsmen, Command Triads, Public Affairs Officers, and other guidance explaining our policy in plain language. Each includes information about personal and operational security and appropriate online conduct.

What We Are Doing – Policy Refinements and Additional Actions

Following the discovery of the “Marines United” website, Navy stood up a Senior Leader Working Group to attack this issue from the top down. We are going after this problem in several ways, including:

- Completing force-wide discussion on “No Bystanders” and expectations of online conduct, as outlined by the Chief of Naval Operations on March 16, 2017
- Investigating suspected misbehavior and holding individuals accountable as appropriate – both criminally and administratively
- Encouraging anyone with direct knowledge of explicit photos taken or distributed without consent or knowledge, to contact the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) via text, web, or smartphone app
- Establishing NCIS Text Tip Hotline links on Navy websites
- Reviewing the Uniform Code of Military Justice and Navy policy governing administrative separation
- Reviewing online policies and guides for Sailors’ personal and professional activity.
- Expanding the extent to which we address online behavior in our continuing sexual assault/sexual harassment campaign plan
- Reviewing and expanding initial recruit and officer accession training
- Executing a Leader Development Framework, part of the Navy’s *Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority*. The framework outlines how the Navy will develop leaders who demonstrate both operational excellence and strong character.

Resources Available to Victims of Cyber Bullying and Hazing

Sailors or civilian employees who see or experience online misconduct are being strongly encouraged to promptly report it to their supervisor or chain of command. Additional reporting methods include contacting the NCIS text and tip line or the IG Hotline, especially for those instances in which the supervisor or chain of command may be involved in alleged misconduct. To assist personnel in accessing other methods of reporting, all Navy websites have been updated to provide a link to the NCIS text and tip line.

We provide support to victims through multiple resources, including counselors, chaplains, deployed resiliency counselors, mental health providers, legal assistance, Victim Legal Counsels, Sexual Assault Response Coordinators, Victim Advocates, *Military OneSource* counseling, and command managed equal opportunity representatives.

Additional Tools We Need

We are currently assessing all legal and administrative tools at our disposal to attack this problem, and considering additional authorities we might need, and we welcome your assistance.

Once we complete our reviews and assessments, we will not hesitate to ask Congress for assistance in providing additional tools to help eradicate this behavior from our Navy.

Summary

Admiral Richardson charged commanding officers at each level of leadership to talk to every member of their team about what respect for teammates looks like – at work, at home and online. He instructed commanders to make it absolutely clear that individuals who do not, and cannot, live up to our professional standards, in competence and character, are not welcome in our Navy. He reiterated that our standards call us to a higher commitment than the law – we are better than that. Finally, he charged them with making it crystal clear that to remain the world’s most powerful Navy, we must be 100 percent focused on staying ahead of our competition, which starts with leadership and teamwork that is built on trust and respect. This is a challenge to all Navy leaders. Navy leaders, from the flag level down to the deck plates, own this problem. As a team, we will solve it.