

RECORD VERSION

**STATEMENT BY
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BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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ON SOCIAL MEDIA (ONLINE CONDUCT) POLICIES IN THE ARMY

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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, Distinguished Members of this Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the United States Army to provide testimony regarding the Army's Social Media and Online Conduct policies.

The Army Position on Social Media/Online Misconduct

The Army is a values-based organization comprised of trusted Army professionals – Soldiers and Army Civilians – who serve our nation. Harassment, bullying, hazing, stalking, discrimination, retaliation, any other type of misconduct that undermines dignity and respect will not be tolerated. The Army has worked diligently to develop a holistic continuum for professional conduct in all aspects of Soldiers' and Army Civilians' lives. The Army has implemented our online conduct policies throughout every level of training and military education so that every Soldier understands how to treat others with dignity and respect, even while benefiting from the potential anonymity of the internet.

Current Army Social Media/Online Conduct Policies.

Army policy for online conduct, which is punitive, states that hazing, bullying, and other behaviors that undermine dignity and respect are fundamentally in opposition to the Army Values and are prohibited. This policy, along with supplemental guidance published in 2015, also makes clear that this prohibition applies at all times and extends to all forms of virtual or electronic media government issued and personal devices. Commanders and supervisors at all levels are responsible for enforcing this prohibition:

and are required to publish and post written command policy statements on the treatment of persons; conduct annual hazing and bullying training including online conduct; and take appropriate action in response to alleged violations. Commanders also conduct Command Climate assessments at a minimum annually that may identify inappropriate behaviors.

The Army's Ongoing Social Media/Online Conduct Initiatives

In 2015, Army senior leadership established a special initiatives team to address online harassment via social media, and to address the challenge of preventing and responding to unprofessional behavior online. Then Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN (Retired) Raymond Odierno, stated, "I expect Soldiers to uphold our Army values, on and off duty, and treat each other with dignity and respect. This applies to our day-to-day interactions, at the office, in the field, on deployment, and at home, both in person and across social media." As a result of GEN (Retired) Odierno's commitment to combatting online harassment, the professionalization of online conduct initiatives team was established. This team included representatives of the major stakeholders: the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASA (M&RA)), the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCS, G1), the Inspector General, Criminal Investigations Division (CID) and the Provost Marshal's Office (PMO), The Judge Advocate General (TJAG), Installation Management, the Chief Information Officer (DCS, G6), Public Affairs (OCPA), Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and prevention (SHARP), Equal Opportunity (EO) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), and Deputy Chief of Staff for Training (DCS, G3).

The special initiatives team outlined three lines of effort, coordinated across the Army and approved by leadership, to achieve the goal of curbing unprofessional online behavior by Soldiers. The three lines of effort focused on (1) updating existing policies, (2) updating training materials and infusing the training base with information and best practices, and (3) sharing information regarding responsible online conduct.

In response to the first line of effort regarding policy, the Army published interim guidance regarding online conduct in July 2015, re-issued in February 2017, to supplement the existing policy in Army Regulation 600-20 concerning the treatment of persons. The interim guidance, which will be incorporated into the next update of the regulation, advises Army personnel that online misconduct, to include harassment, bullying, hazing, stalking, discrimination, and retaliation, is inconsistent with Army Values and negatively impacts command climate and readiness; it encourages Army personnel to apply a “Think, Type, Post” approach to the use of electronic communication devices; and it encourages personnel experiencing or witnessing online misconduct to report it. The Army Social Media Handbook similarly advises Army personnel to: “**Think**” about what message is being communicated and who could potentially view it; “**Type**” messages that are consistent with U.S. Army Values; and “**Post**” only if the message demonstrates dignity and respect for self and others.

Furthermore, the Army developed methods to track and report online misconduct; updated its policies and contractual provisions to clarify Contractor responsibility for

appropriate online conduct; and updated its Acceptable Use Policy and Network Access User Agreement to address online misconduct while using government systems.

Members of the Army Team may seek information regarding mistreatment of persons or online misconduct from the following agencies: Family support services; Equal Opportunity professionals; Equal Employment Opportunity offices; the Inspector General (IG); law enforcement; and Army SHARP professionals. Agencies then refer complaints to the Commander, the IG, or law enforcement to file a complaint pertaining to the treatment of persons. Victims of sexual harassment conducted online are eligible for advocacy services from SHARP professionals, including referral services to mental health or Special Victim's Counsel (SVC), if applicable.

In response to the second line of effort regarding training, the Army modified the standardized Army programs of instruction and training plans on equal opportunity during initial military training and professional military education. This training includes discussion points and vignettes with respect to electronic communications and online conduct. These discussion points and vignettes have been incorporated into institutional, command, and unit training packages for Equal Opportunity (EO), Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Treatment of Persons, Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), and Cyber Awareness, among others. This training is for enlisted and officer personnel, and includes pre-command courses for command teams from company through brigade level, and functional courses that train recruiters

and initial military training cadre, such as drill sergeants and Advanced Individual Training platoon sergeants.

The instruction on social media and online conduct provides guidance on how Soldiers should conduct themselves online in a way that is consistent with the Army's Command Policy and the Army Values. The training defines online conduct and misconduct, and emphasizes the "think, type, post" approach that Soldiers should exercise to reduce the likelihood that they will they'll behave inappropriately online. Multiple vignettes are included to generate analysis and discussion, with checks on learning. The lesson also dispels the myths of anonymity, non-attribution, and impunity surrounding Soldier use of social media. In addition to giving Commanders and Leaders the information and tools they need to educate their Soldiers and respond appropriately to complaints, this line of effort contributes immeasurably to the Army's efforts to train current and future Soldiers and Army Civilians on how to protect themselves, identify and prevent inappropriate behavior, and report online-related misconduct.

In response to the third line of effort regarding communication, Army Public Affairs has developed a strategic messaging campaign to raise awareness of appropriate online conduct and the consequences of misconduct. As part of our communications information campaign, the Army has developed a Social Media Handbook that includes expanded discussion of online responsibilities and a "Best Practices" section on protecting oneself from and reporting online misconduct. In addition, the U.S. Army

Criminal Investigation Command is enhancing the Army's cyber understanding through cyber-crime prevention flyers to safeguard our Soldiers during their online activities.

Finally, the "Not in My Squad" program developed by the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic presents workshops and videos to Soldiers and Army Civilians on professional conduct. This initiative was designed to help Soldiers assess the state of mutual trust and cohesion within their squads. The grass-roots nature of the workshops helps junior leaders to gain situational understanding and inspire ethical and professional behavior. Based on their perceptions in the survey and workshops, individuals are directed to resources that can help them reinforce success, make adjustments to strengthen areas of weakness, and consider alternatives that can remediate areas of concern. This program facilitates leader involvement and accountability and aids in the creation of a professional and ethical culture among members of the Army Team.

Accountability and Monitoring

Leaders are responsible for communicating social media expectations to their Soldiers and Army Civilians. Army personnel using social media must abide by the UCMJ at all times, even when off duty while utilizing their private devices.

The Way Forward

The Army is aware of the potential negative aspects within the social media networks and is proactively working through policies, training, and programs to ensure Soldiers remain vigilant and know appropriate online behavior. The Army will continue to enforce

standards and imbue Soldiers and Army Civilians with Army Values and place an emphasis on professional behavior in all that we do.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share the Army's program and initiatives. I look forward to your questions.