

STATEMENT

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DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS**

**OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL

OF THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

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US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding the Department of Defense's (DoD) policies addressing sexual harassment, hazing, and bullying by Service members through the use of electronic communications, including online social media sites.

The Department is committed to promoting an environment where all Service members are treated with dignity and respect. We are focused on eradicating behaviors that undermine military readiness, including unlawful discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), hazing, and bullying. Such misconduct is fundamentally at odds with our core values and the expectations of the American people. These behaviors jeopardize our military missions, weaken trust within our ranks, and erode unit cohesion.

DoD is an institution held in high regard by the American people, mostly because we embody high standards and values. However, we are not a perfect institution. We do our best to uphold our standards and values across the world, every minute of every day. On occasion, Service members fail to meet them; when that happens, we endeavor to the best of our ability, to hold each and every one accountable for their action. It is because of this we are an effective fighting force able to carry out the missions assigned by our nation.

Personal behavior in social media represents an area where we find it difficult to: (1) be aware of what Service members are doing in that space, and (2) hold Service members accountable. As the members here today are aware, just because an American citizen joins the military, they do not give up all their rights. In the recent cases reported in the media, the individuals clearly demonstrated unacceptable behavior. In response, we will offer our full support for any Service members targeted by this abhorrent behavior. We will also take all available action to hold offenders appropriately accountable.

I can tell you that the Secretary of Defense is investing a significant amount of his personal time to this issue, providing his vision and direction directly to the Service Secretaries and the Department's most senior uniformed leaders and listening to those most involved in setting and upholding our standards and values. The Secretary believes that our most successful and ready warfighting units are those with the best discipline; they also have the lowest rates of bad behavior. On the battlefield, you must have full trust and confidence in your teammates. That is not possible when you do not treat them with dignity and respect. So, the Secretary has charged all of his leaders to ensure the proper command climate through proactive and positive leadership. In addition to the Secretary's direct guidance to leaders, the Department has issued

some policies in this space over the past few years.

Current DoD Policies:

In September 2014, the Department issued an updated policy memorandum on Prevention and Response to Sexual Harassment. This policy strengthens the policies and programs associated with sexual harassment; directs senior-level oversight of prevention training; outlines mechanisms for reporting incidents of sexual harassment, including procedures for reporting anonymously; and requires the reporting of the response to and resolution of alleged sexual harassment involving members of the Armed Forces. The policy states that all complaints of sexual harassment are processed according to existing sexual harassment investigative procedures.

- In December 2015, the Department issued a Hazing and Bullying Prevention and Response policy memorandum. The policy prohibits hazing and bullying in all circumstances and environments, including off-duty or in “unofficial” unit functions and settings. This policy includes such behaviors that may occur in the context of in-person interactions or “via electronic communications.”
- In January 2017, DoD issued “The DoD Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy and Implementation Plan.” The plan directs the Military Services and the National Guard Bureau to update their respective social media policies to specifically prohibit retaliatory behavior, including, but not limited to, reprisal, ostracism, cruelty, oppression, maltreatment, and bullying against any victim, bystander, or first responder to a sexual assault or sexual harassment report. Required implementation of the aspects of the plan by the Military Services is projected to be completed by the end of FY 2018.

DoD and Service policies prohibit any form of harassment, hazing, and bullying. Current policy directs each Military Service to plan and conduct , in-person training within units to inform Service members how to prevent sexual harassment and ensure they are aware of the avenues for reporting such conduct, to include making anonymous reports. To comport with DoD sexual harassment, hazing, and bullying prevention and response policies, the Military Services have Service-specific policy and prevention efforts. You will hear directly from the Service representatives on this topic.

In closing, I want to assure members here today that this issue has the personal attention

of the Department's most senior leaders. It reduces our warfighting effectiveness. We will address it by continuing to build up awareness of our core values and standards and ensure we hold appropriately accountable those who fail to meet those standards. We thank Congress and the Subcommittee for their steadfast support of our efforts to promote the safest and most respectful environment for our Service members and for the civilian workforce who support them.