

INITIATIVES TO COMBAT SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

The men and women of the U.S. military deserve an environment that is free from the threat of sexual assault. Service members and their families must feel secure enough to report this crime without fear of retribution and commanders must hold offenders appropriately accountable. Under the leadership of Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta and General Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department is actively pursuing additional policy and training changes to help address this challenging issue.

At a meeting with interested members of Congress, Secretary Panetta announced today additional steps to combat sexual assault in the military. These new initiatives include:

- Elevating disposition authority for the most serious sexual assault offenses (rape, sexual assault, forcible sodomy, and attempts to commit those offenses) so that, at a minimum, these cases are addressed by a “Special Court Martial Convening Authority” who is an officer at the Colonel (or Navy Captain) level.
 - This will ensure that cases of sexual assault receive a high level of command attention, given the seriousness of those offenses.
 - This will also ensure that these cases remain within the chain of command, so that our leaders retain responsibility and accountability for the problem of sexual assault.
- Establishing “Special Victim’s Unit” capabilities within each of the Services, to ensure that specially trained investigators, prosecutors and victim-witness assistance personnel are available to assist with sexual assault cases.
 - This will provide specially-trained experts in evidence collection, interviewing, and interacting with survivors of sexual assault.
- Requiring that sexual assault policies be explained to all service members within 14 days of their entrance on active duty.
 - This will educate our newest members right away, so that they enter the military knowing that our culture will not tolerate sexual assault, and understand what to do in the event an offense occurs.
- Allowing Reserve and National Guard personnel who have been sexually assaulted while on active duty to remain in their active duty status in order to obtain the treatment and support afforded to active duty members.
- Requiring a record of the outcome of disciplinary and administrative proceedings related to sexual assault, and requiring that copies of those records be centrally retained.
 - This will allow the Department to better track our progress in combating sexual assault in the military, and will help better identify potential patterns of misconduct and systemic issues.

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- Requiring commanders to conduct annual organizational climate assessments.
 - This will allow commanders to measure whether they are meeting the Department's goal of a culture of professionalism and respect and zero-tolerance of sexual assault.
- Mandating wider public dissemination of available sexual assault resources, like the DoD "Safe Helpline". The helpline is available 24 hours a day via web, phone, or text message and is operated by the non-profit Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network through a contractual agreement with the department. Between its launch in April 2011 through Sept. 2011, the Safe Helpline assisted more than 770 individuals. The helpline can be reached at 877-995-5247 or <http://www.safehelpline.org>
- Enhancing training programs for sexual assault prevention, including training for new military commanders in handling sexual assault matters.

The initiatives announced today build on new victim-focused policies that have been implemented in the past year, these initiatives include:

- Assignment of a two star general as the Director of our Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.
- Expansion of legal assistance for military spouses and adult military dependents, so they can file confidential reports and receive the services of a victim advocate and a sexual assault response coordinator.
- Expedited transfers of victims who report a sexual assault to protect them from possible harassment and remove them from proximity to the alleged perpetrator.
- Extended retention of forensic examination and investigative reports.
- Establishment of a sexual assault advocate credentialing and certification program.
- Expansion of sexual assault support services to military spouses and adult military dependents.
- Expansion of emergency care and support services to DoD civilians stationed abroad and DoD U.S. citizen contractors in combat areas.
- Increased funding for investigators and judge advocates to receive additional specialized training.
- Implementation of an integrated data system for tracking sexual assault reports and managing cases.
- Assessment of how the department trains commanding officers and senior enlisted leaders on sexual assault prevention and response.

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