

United States Air Force Report on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response to the President of the United States: Executive Summary

The Air Force has a long legacy of facing challenges head-on. The fight to eliminate sexual assault from our ranks is one such challenge that we will be engaged in until the Air Force is free from sexual assault. This challenge will take bold and persistent leadership, persistent focus, and persistent action to realize our vision of an Air Force free from sexual assault. We have no doubt that our Airmen will achieve this vision because there isn't a challenge that Airmen have accepted and failed to achieve. One of the keys to successfully addressing sexual assault is to ensure every Airman has the opportunity to live and work in a healthy environment where he or she is treated with dignity and respect. There is no place in that environment for the degradation of individuals through acts of sexual harassment or sexual assault. First and foremost, it is inconsistent with our Core Values: *"Integrity First"*, *"Service Before Self"*, and *"Excellence in All We Do."* And secondly, it goes against everything our mission espouses when protecting and defending democracy at home or abroad.

The Air Force educates officer, enlisted, and civilian Airmen on the continuum of harm so they can identify and eliminate behaviors that may lead to sexual assault. Starting from first contact with a recruiter and continuing through an Airman's professional military education, the Air Force builds upon established sexual assault prevention and response core competencies and learning objectives for all training. Air Force recruiters initiate this process by briefing new recruits on the definitions of sexual assault, sexual harassment, unprofessional relationships, and the requirement to report misconduct in the recruitment phase. The sexual assault prevention and response education continues at Basic Military Training, where 11.5-hours of core training focus on gender diversity, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. The building block approach strengthens our Airmen's Core Value development at Basic Military Training and is due in large part to the implementation of 43 recommendations from a 2012 review.

For future officers, the Air Force Academy now trains leaders using a sexual assault prevention and response philosophy that throughout the first year, the cadet is a follower; second year a role model; third year a worker/coach; and fourth year a leader. In addition, the Reserve Officer Training Corps and the Officer Training School curriculum includes three-hours of sexual assault prevention and response instruction covering the effects of sexual assault on a unit's trust and cohesion, the importance of victim empathy, and how gender relations and sexism can impact trust.

While every Airman is accountable for the climate where he or she lives and works, commanders have special accountability and authority to ensure good order and discipline in their unit and are held accountable for the climate they create. To help commanders with climate issues, in 2005, the Air Force placed a full-time sexual assault response coordinator at every installation to include deployed locations. Today, each installation now has at least one full-time sexual assault response coordinator and one full-time victim advocate and many installations have several more than two. The Air Force thoroughly screens candidates using a national agency background check and

only selects the highest qualified personnel. Sexual assault response coordinators and sexual assault prevention and response victim advocates are trained to provide commanders advice and counsel on climate issues in their unit and also to provide professional, respectful care to sexual assault victims. These individuals also lead the sexual assault prevention and response education and training at their installation and are skilled at providing programs that meet the needs of each individual installation.

Shortly after hiring its first sexual assault response coordinators, the Air Force stood-up a week-long in-residence course to provide training and education for this very critical position at the tip of the spear. In 2014, this course was revised and almost doubled in length to respond to feedback from sexual assault response coordinators in the field on areas that needed more discussion before a sexual assault response coordinator assumed his or her duties. We published our first sexual assault prevention and response policy document in 2008, which has been revised several times since then to provide current direction to the field. According to multiple studies, sexual assault is one of the most under reported crimes in our nation. Reasons often provided for not reporting include: self-blame or guilt, shame, or desire to keep the assault a private matter, fear of not being believed or of being accused of playing a role in the crime, and lack of trust in the criminal justice system.

To encourage victims to report, our early efforts to eliminate this crime focused on response and becoming experts at taking care of sexual assault victims. Our response efforts fell into three main efforts: taking care of the victims that report the crime, professionally investigating the reported crimes, and then professionally prosecuting the crimes as appropriate. It is well understood that we need experts in every part of the response system to appropriately provide justice to sexual assault victims. To provide this expertise we have systematically identified and provided additional resources and training for our response systems to develop a world-class response capability.

As mentioned above, sexual assault response coordinators offer vital support to commanders and manage a compassionate victim response program. To ensure unrivaled victim advocacy, the Air Force employs 118 nationally certified sexual assault response coordinators, and each one completes the 8-day qualification course and 32 hours of continuing education bi-annually. Our sexual assault response coordinators provide commanders with a unique 24/7 victim response and care capability and are the focal point for assuring services are provided to a sexual assault victim from the initial report through final disposition. Sexual assault response coordinator positions are filled predominately by civilians acting as the lifeblood of the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program, providing us with a highly skilled and stable workforce. Assisting our sexual assault response coordinators are 2,248 military and civilian volunteer victim advocates who comprise our unique Air Force capability to provide compassionate care for sexual assault victims.

Beyond the initial response, comprehensive medical care is critical to supporting victims. For each victim the Air Force Medical system provides and/or coordinates medical care, mental health support, and completion of a sexual assault forensic

examination at the victim's request. The Air Force Medical Service's goal is to support the victim while also ensuring credible evidence collection. To accomplish this goal the Air Force has assigned certified sexual assault forensic examiners at every 24-hour Air Force medical treatment facility. Additionally, at locations not serviced by a 24/7 military treatment facility the Air Force establishes memorandums of understanding with local community resources to ensure victim care and credible evidence collection.

In further pursuit of world-class victim advocacy, the Air Force introduced the Special Victims' Counsel Program in fiscal year 2013, which many consider to be one of the most significant advancements in the area of victim support. This program gives sexual assault victims a voice in the legal process and enables judge advocates to assert their clients' rights both in and out of court. The special victims' counsel is the first of its kind to provide Airmen and their family members who are victims of sexual assault with their own attorney, free of charge. Since the program's inception, special victims' counsel have represented more than 1,000 victims of sexual assault with 91% of victims who completed a survey indicating they were "extremely satisfied" and 8% "satisfied" with the support they received from their special victims' counsel.

The Air Force started focusing on a future free of sexual assault in 2003, stationing 10 DNA trace analysts at the United States Army Criminal Investigations Laboratory in an effort to decrease crime lab processing time. To continue the trend, the Air Force increased its investigative capacity in 2011, adding 24 dedicated sexual assault investigators to the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. These dedicated investigators ensure the highest quality criminal investigations. In support of this initiative and holding perpetrators appropriately accountable, we equipped our investigators with cutting-edge investigative equipment to preserve credibility of both dry and wet forensic evidence. In 2013, the Office of Special Investigations took the lead role in all sexual assault investigation efforts to provide a single point of contact for these cases. The Air Force also created cross-functional training programs between investigators, and judge advocates to foster better understanding and collaboration between these two organizations. This collaboration results in better investigations, which in turn, results in justice for both the victim and the accused.

Over the last three years, we continued to provide a fair and equitable justice system while making vast improvements to both judicial and non-judicial treatment of victims throughout the process. Our system promotes justice and contributes to maintaining good order and discipline within the military establishment. We introduced a special victim capability, comprised of specially trained judge advocates, victim witness assistance personnel, and paralegals who work collaboratively with Air Force Office of Special Investigations agents to ensure effective, timely, responsive worldwide victim support, and the capability to investigate sexual assault offenses in order to hold perpetrators appropriately accountable.

The special victims unit senior trial counsel that are part of the special victim capability are critical to successfully prosecuting sexual assault cases. Special victims unit senior trial counsel are specially trained, experienced judge advocates responsible for

prosecuting sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, and child sexual assault offenses. Victim witness assistance program personnel are appointed by staff judge advocates to assist victims during the military justice process.

Although effective investigation and response are important, we do not believe that solely prosecuting the offenders is the most effective way to prevent this crime. In March 2007, we started focusing on prevention by hosting a sexual assault prevention and risk reduction symposium. From this symposium, the Air Force developed a prevention methodology aimed at teaching Airmen how to protect one another from sexual assault. The methodology concentrated on combating the adverse effects of corroding unit trust and integrity resulting from sexual assault. In 2010, the Air Force launched its first bystander intervention training. This training was created by industry experts and aimed at preventing future sexual assaults. We spent two years training the entire force on bystander intervention and have now imbedded this training within our established training infrastructure. This campaign set the tone for the more recent evolution of prevention and response training and we continue our focus on prevention by operationalizing the latest research from the academic community on sexual violence prevention.

The impact of the Air Force's sexual assault prevention and response campaign is reflected in the reporting and estimated prevalence data trends over the last three fiscal years. Since fiscal year 2012, sexual assault reporting increased 61% with a shift to unrestricted reports, which went from 58% of the total reports to 69%. Similarly, the percentage of Airmen who indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact in the preceding year dropped to its lowest level since 2006, when sexual assault prevalence was first measured. In fiscal year 2012, the prevalence rate among female Airmen was 3.1% and in fiscal year 2014 that rate dropped to 2.28%. A similar trend is shared among male Airmen. In fiscal year 2012, the unwanted sexual contact prevalence rate was 0.5%. In fiscal year 2014 the rate dropped to 0.43%. The decrease in prevalence and increase in reporting resulted in cutting the gap between incidence and reporting in half. In fiscal year 2012 approximately 1 in every 6 Airmen who experienced unwanted sexual contact reported it; in fiscal year 2014 approximately 1 in every 3 Airmen who experienced unwanted sexual contact reported it.

Over the last three years, we have solidified the foundation for executing the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program and demonstrated an unwavering commitment to eliminating sexual assault among our ranks. Despite many competing challenges, Air Force leadership remains personally and wholeheartedly engaged in exploring new frontiers and breaking down barriers to solve this complex and sensitive issue. Our Airmen will embrace this challenge and their vision will shape the Air Force's sexual assault prevention and response future. Whether they serve in the skies above or on the ground below, today's Airmen represent the best of America, and they will succeed in creating a future Air Force free of sexual assault.