

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS RELEASES ANNUAL STATUTORY REPORT ON SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

WASHINGTON, DC: The United States Commission on Civil Rights has released its 2013 statutory enforcement report, “Sexual Assault in the Military.” The Commission releases a statutory report annually on a topic of great significance for civil rights in America. The purpose of this year’s report was to examine how the Department of Defense and its Armed Services – the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force – respond to Service members who are victims of, or accused of perpetrating, sexual assault. This topic is of significance and timely, as Congress is considering ways to address the issue.

The Commission conducted extensive research and held a briefing to gather information from military officials, scholars, advocacy groups, clinical practitioners, and members of the public on the topic. The report also includes interviews and statements from lawyers and advocates who are knowledgeable about the challenges that sexual assault reports pose for the military. The Commission’s report reveals a need for more extensive data and emphasizes the importance of commander training and accountability, although the Department of Defense has already implemented policies to reduce both assaults and also the prevalence in the workplace of sexually suggestive materials that may contribute to sexual harassment.

The Commission’s report notes that female Service members represent 14 percent of the military population but are disproportionately likely to be sexual assault victims. The Commission examined cases of sexual assault from the viewpoints of victims and accused perpetrators who all claimed unfair treatment by the military. The Commission’s report notes that the Department of Defense has already implemented a plan to standardize sexual assault responses and provide prevention training across the Services to promote best practices, the effect of which has yet to be measured.

Chairman Castro stated, “The thought that those who enlist are at risk of being sexually assaulted by their comrades in arms -- and of suffering retaliatory actions for reporting the crimes -- is antithetical to the ideals for which our country and our military stand. All efforts must be made to understand and resolve all aspects of this troubling issue. In the end, this is really about who

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Martin R. Castro, Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Roberta Achtenberg, Todd Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter Kirsanow, David Kladney, and Michael Yaki. Commission meetings and briefings are open to the general public. The Commission’s website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.

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we are as a nation. If we cannot, or will not protect our protectors, then we have failed to live up to the ideals upon which our freedom is founded. If we cannot ensure the rights of those who fight and give their lives so that we might enjoy our rights, then the system is broken. It is our hope that this Report contributes to efforts to fix the system that should protect our men and women in uniform.”

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