



Commanding Officer, Headquarters and Support Battalion Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Statement



"One key to prevention is to understand that sexual assaults often occur in environments where crude and offensive behavior, unwanted sexual attention, coercion, and sexual harassment are tolerated, ignored, or condoned. These behaviors detract from our mission and put our people at risk, and you have to be a part of the solution."

-- Dr. Ashton Carter, SecDef

Sexual assault is defined as intentional sexual contact characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when a victim does not or cannot consent. It is an unthinkable crime that victimizes irrespective of gender, race, or age. It not only undermines unit trust and confidence vital to mission accomplishment, it threatens to tarnish the honor of our Corps. Few threats pose a greater risk to readiness and mission effectiveness than these attacks from within. Proactive leadership within the Battalion is required to prevent this threat from materializing.

I will not tolerate sexual assault or negligent leadership that fails to address and mitigate the risk of sexual assault. All members of the Battalion are responsible and accountable for eliminating the conditions that foster sexual assault. Additionally, you are all tasked with intervening in situations or behaviors that could potentially result in a sexual assault. To reiterate – it is *your* inherent duty to prevent sexual assault. As warfighters, you have a bias for action and should not stand idly by in the face of such a threat.

Our Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program focuses heavily on prevention, recognizing that the vast majority of sexual assaults could have been avoided through proper leadership and force protection measures. Our culture of prevention will be strengthened through engaged leadership, education, training, open communication, heightened awareness, proactive risk reduction, and the active support of highly competent and committed Uniformed Victim Advocates (UVA). Additionally, our preventative efforts will be integrated fully into all other force preservation programs within the Battalion.

Our SAPR program includes response procedures that focus on providing effective care for victims with the intent of avoiding re-victimization and reducing the impact of a sexual assault on the health and readiness of members of the Battalion. Trust is critical - victims must have complete confidence that they will be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and without prejudice. They must also trust that appropriate confidentiality will be guaranteed. Every member of this Battalion will respect and protect the dignity of victims by eliminating hearsay, rumors, and conjecture. Facts will only be discussed with law enforcement personnel and with members within the chain of command who have a need to know.

Finally, all members of the Battalion will report any observed sexual assault immediately to PMO and/or their chain of command. No one in this Battalion is authorized to conduct an independent inquiry or investigation. Unrestricted reports of sexual assault will be immediately forwarded to Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Headquarters Marine Corps, and to the Commanding General, Marine Corps Installations West-Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

In addition to making an unrestricted report to their chain of command, victims have the option of making a restricted report to the installation Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), the command UVA, healthcare personnel, or via the DoD SAFE Helpline at 1-877-995-5247 (www.safehelpline.org). For immediate victim support, call the UVA duty phone at 760-815-7593.

Semper Fidelis,

John R. Polidoro, Jr.
Colonel, United States Marine Corps
Commanding Officer, Headquarters and Support Battalion