

## **SPEAKING UP:**

*The Family Violence Prevention Fund's News & Tips for the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Communities*

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### **Defense Task force on domestic violence calls for culture shift in the military**

To better address domestic violence in the military, the Department of Defense (DoD) must establish a military culture that does not tolerate domestic violence, holds batterers accountable for their actions, and provides victims of abuse with the services they need. These are among the recommendations offered by the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence in its final Report, which is now available online.

The Report identifies ways to prevent and curb domestic abuse in the military and provide more timely and effective aid to victims. It contains approximately 200 detailed recommendations for how the DoD can prevent and improve its response to domestic violence. The Report's executive summary also addresses other family violence issues including child abuse, as well as sexual assault. Members of Congress are looking at the Task Force as a model as they consider how to further investigate sexual assault in the military and at the Service Academies, and the best ways to improve the DoD's response to sexual violence.

"This Report is the result of painstaking, difficult work to bring together two communities that have had few formal ties in the past," said Deborah D. Tucker, Task Force Co-Chair and Executive Director of the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence. "Our mandate was urgent to find ways to protect victims of domestic violence in the military and in military families, and to ensure that the military does much more to stop domestic violence. If these recommendations are implemented with adequate resources and continuing guidance from experts, they offer the promise that members of military families will face fewer domestic assaults and homicides."

In the past, advocates have been deeply dissatisfied with the military's response to domestic violence, criticizing the various Services for not taking the issue seriously, failing to provide the services and support that victims need, and failing to punish service members who abuse their partners. The Family Violence Prevention Fund, National Network to End Domestic Violence and the Miles Foundation, which provides services to victims of domestic and sexual violence associated with the military, were among the organizations that worked to convince Congress to create the Task Force and/or commented on its previous reports.

It was, in part, this pressure from the community that spurred Congress to charter the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence in October of 1999 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000. The Task Force was commissioned to help the Secretary of Defense prevent domestic violence in the military whenever possible and respond more effectively to abuse when it does occur.

The Task Force was composed of 24 members 12 from the Military Services and 12 of the nation's leading domestic violence experts and battered women's advocates. It included survivors of domestic abuse among both its civilian and military members and modeled cooperation by selecting a civilian and a military Co-Chair. Tucker's counterpart is Lt. General Garry L. Parks, the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. Together they led the Task Force in developing the recommendations, meeting more than 15 times over three years and visiting military installations in the U.S. and overseas.

### **Task Force Recommendations**

Task Force recommendations focus on prevention and early intervention and call for the creation of

programs that address the needs of military families experiencing domestic violence. They include:

- Culture Shift:

The Department of Defense should create a military culture that does not tolerate domestic violence, holds offenders accountable for their actions and punishes criminal behavior. The Task Force calls on the military to provide victims with the services they need while ensuring confidentiality, and train commanding officers, law enforcement and others on how to handle allegations of domestic violence in military families.

- Victim Advocate Program:

Each Military Service should create a strong Victim Advocate Program, giving victim advocates sufficient support, stature, autonomy, access to commanding officers and authority to intervene in crises and provide case management and safety planning services to victims of abuse. Victim advocates may be local battered women's programs that are under contract to provide these services. Victims of abuse often do not seek help because they fear that their privacy will be violated, and that they will harm the career of a family member in the Service. The Task Force recommends that victim advocacy programs have provisions for nondisclosure to enhance victims' safety, encourage voluntary reporting of abuse and ensure confidentiality whenever possible.

- Domestic Violence Intervention Process Model:

The Department of Defense should implement a domestic violence intervention process model to serve as a guideline for responding to incidents of domestic violence. The Task Force recommends a domestic violence intervention process model with specific protocols for victim advocates, commanding officers, law enforcement personnel and offender intervention. Each of the protocols provides a description of the recommended intervention process and includes guidance for responding to domestic violence.

- Assessment and Intervention Teams:

The Department of Defense should replace the existing Case Review Committee structure with newly created Domestic Violence Assessment and Intervention Teams that will provide feedback regarding victim safety and offender intervention to commanding officers within 48 hours of when a domestic violence incident occurs. These Teams should be managed by the Family Advocacy Program and should ensure that danger/lethality assessments are conducted with victims and children as soon as violence occurs or is reported.

- Fatality Reviews:

To increase system and command accountability, the Task Force recommends creation of a fatality review process. Examining domestic violence homicides and suicides can provide valuable information that can help deter future such incidents. The Department of Defense should: institute an annual fatality review summit; instruct the Services to establish, train and maintain on-call multidisciplinary fatality review teams; and instruct military installations to include fatality review provisions in their domestic violence agreements with civilian jurisdictions that call for reciprocal participation in fatality reviews as needed.

- Training and Prevention Programs:

The Department of Defense should implement institution-wide training and prevention programs, including general public awareness campaigns and trainings for chaplains, law enforcement and health care personnel, senior enlisted and commanding officers.

- Accountability for Offenders:

In 2001, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum stating that domestic violence will not

be tolerated in the Department of Defense. The Task Force calls on the Department of Defense and the Military Departments to intensify their efforts to prevent domestic violence by ensuring that the institution, not the victim, is responsible for holding perpetrators of domestic violence responsible for their actions. Whenever possible and appropriate, the focus should be on domestic violence prevention rather than punishment after a crime has occurred, but offenders must be held accountable for all criminal conduct through punishment, deterrence and, when possible, rehabilitation. Commanding officers or others should monitor and supervise offenders to ensure compliance and progress during any mandated intervention programs.

- Strengthen Collaboration Between Military and Civilian Communities:

The Department of Defense should ensure cooperative relationships between military and civilian organizations to develop a coordinated response to domestic violence. The Task Force calls on the military to work with local civilian communities, as well as national civilian agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to promote domestic violence prevention and intervention in the military.

- Evaluation:

The Department of Defense should continuously evaluate the results of its domestic violence prevention and intervention efforts, and use this information to improve existing policies.

“If these recommendations are implemented fully and with adequate resources and care, fewer members of military families will experience violence and those who do face abuse will get more help more quickly,” Tucker added. “The Task Force takes an essential first step by making these recommendations, and it is up to leaders at the Department of Defense to make implementation a priority. But I have every confidence that they take our work seriously. The military members of the Task Force are already exercising leadership in setting up training and asking for policy changes within their Services. Civilian members of the Task Force will continue to support and assist the Department in the implementation of our recommendations.”

### **House Armed Services Committee**

Task Force Co-Chairs presented the recommendations to the House Armed Services Committee, Sub-Committee on Total Force in March. “The Task Force believes that domestic violence is best dealt with by having a consistent, coordinated community response,” said General Parks at the hearing. “It is important for everyone associated with the military to know what domestic violence is, its dynamics and risk factors, effects on victims or children who witness domestic violence, and consequences for offenders.”

The Task Force’s charter ends at the end of April and Tucker told the Sub-Committee that the final Report gives the DoD “philosophic guidelines” for addressing domestic violence. Tucker discussed the core principles: respond to the needs of victims and provide for victim safety; hold offenders accountable; consider cultural factors; consider the context of violence and provide a measured response; coordinate the military and civilian response; involve victims of domestic violence; and provide early intervention.

Both Co-Chairs underscored the importance of domestic violence training for commanding officers so they can hold batterers accountable and send the message that domestic violence will not be tolerated in the armed services. Creating a military culture that takes domestic violence seriously and does not tolerate abuse “starts with training and education to understand the basics of domestic violence,” General Parks said. The military will give officers the tools they need to properly handle incidents of domestic violence, he added.

The panel also included Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) Charles S. Abell. In his testimony, Abell addressed the DoD’s commitment to instituting the Task Force’s recommendations as soon as possible, as resources allow. “The tragic events in the Fort Bragg community brought renewed focus on the issue of domestic violence. We must set a mood and tone of

leadership that sends a clear message: first, that domestic violence is incompatible with military service and, second, that it is right and safe for a victim to come forward as the first step to stopping a case of domestic violence,” he said. “The steps we have taken and the steps we plan to take reflect our strong commitment to address domestic violence. The gradual introduction of these and other policy initiatives will form the foundation for a culture shift that clearly conveys domestic violence will not be tolerated in DoD.”