Officials Reaffirm DOD’s Commitment to Fighting Sexual Assault

By Terri Moon Cronk

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 30, 2013 – At an open house marking the Defense Department’s launch of a new peer-support service for sexual assault victims, senior Pentagon officials today reaffirmed the department’s commitment to eradicating sexual assault in the military.

The Defense Department has joined with a private organization to launch the DOD Safe HelpRoom -- a private online chat room for service members and military families to seek help following an assault. The new service gives victims and survivors access to chats with their peers, through an agreement with the nonprofit Rape, Incest and Abuse National Network.

“Sexual assault is a crime DOD will not tolerate,” said Jessica L. Wright, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, and a 35-year military veteran. “Our service members sign up to protect the United States, and they have to feel safe within our ranks. “I know what it’s like to be asked to do risky things, and we don’t want to put our service members at risk as they’re doing [their jobs].”

From the newest private to the secretary of defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff “and everybody in between,” Wright said, we’ve locked arms against this crime, and we will work diligently to eradicate it from our ranks.”

Eliminating sexual assault from the military will require a culture change, said Army Maj. Gen. Gary S. Patton, director of the Defense Department’s sexual assault prevention and
response office, known as SAPRO. A society that doesn’t tolerate sexual assault is one where people are treated with dignity and respect, and where victims know they’ll be treated with privacy and sensitivity, the general said. “And offenders will know they will be found and held accountable as appropriate,” he added.

Patton said “assessing ourselves” is a priority in combatting sexual assault, to ensure that programs and policies work. “SAPRO and RAINN are working together in prevention, investigation, accountability, victim support and assessment,” he said.

“We see ourselves as a national leader in sexual assault, its prevention and response,” Patton said. “Part of being a national leader is innovation, and the innovation you see today with the mobile app, the safe help room – the first of its kind with a peer-to-peer, secure venue where victims of sexual assault – can chat in a closely moderated and very professional chat room.”

At today’s event, RAINN’s Kimberly “Toni” Korol-Evans received the 2013 award for Safe Helpline Operator of the Year for her work with DOD victims and survivors. Wright told the audience of victim advocates, judge advocates general and sexual assault response coordinators that the work they do for sexual assault victims and survivors is noble.

“What you really do is save lives, through your compassion and concern. The Safe Helpline and the chat room are safe, secure and private, and that’s what these victims of this horrendous crime need as they go through this support system,” she added. The advocates help to turn survivors around so they can lead a prosperous life after they’ve gone through such a tragic, emotional and physical violent act, Wright said.

**BIOGRAPHIES:**

**JESSICA L. WRIGHT**  
ARMY MAJ. GEN. GARY S. PATTON

**RELATED SITES:**  
[DO D SAFE HELPLINE](#)  
SAFE HELPROOM  
[RAPE, ABUSE, INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK](#)  
[SPECIAL REPORT: SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS AND PREVENTION](#)

**RELATED ARTICLES:**  
[DO D ADDS PEER SUPPORT CHAT SESSIONS FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS](#)