

Testimony of David S. Lee  
Director of Prevention Services  
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Before the  
House of Representatives  
House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel  
on  
Sexual Assault in the Military: Prevention  
March 6, 2009

Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Wilson and other members of the Subcommittee on Military Personnel,

Thank you for the privilege of providing testimony to this subcommittee about efforts to prevent sexual violence in the armed services. The mission to end sexual violence requires comprehensive efforts including providing appropriate support to those who have been victimized during the course of their military service, holding offenders accountable for their action and a system-wide commitment for policies and practices that will prevent such a crime to take place.

My name is David Lee and I have been active in the prevention of sexual violence and other forms of violence against women for the last 26 years. It is my honor to serve as the Director of Prevention Services of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), one of the largest and oldest associations of sexual assault crisis programs in the nation.

Over 35 years ago, the first sexual assault crisis programs began providing services, advocacy and support for victims of sexual violence in California. While we have always identified addressing the needs of those who have been sexual assaulted as necessary, these centers recognized that the problem of sexual assault is not only one of individual incidents of sexual violence, but of a culture that creates conditions in which sexual assault flourishes.

Thus, rape crisis enters in California compliment these essential services with community based efforts to prevent sexual violence from taking place. Last year, 84 rape crisis programs provided prevention and educational programming for over 350,000 participants in every jurisdiction of our state. California is also the home to 27 active military installations, each of which benefit from some level of collaboration with their local sexual assault crisis program.

Based on our experience in California, CALCASA was selected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop our project Prevention Connection, the nation's leading online resource on sexual violence prevention efforts through web conferences, eLearning, and other Web 2.0 technologies to advance the application of sexual violence prevention. Under my direction,

Prevention Connection examines the breadth of strategies, approaches and programs working to prevent sexual violence and other forms of violence against women.

Throughout my career I have been engaged in a wide variety of prevention efforts developing the best practices and evidence-based strategies including social marketing, community mobilization, youth leadership development, and community education. In California, we have conducted what was at its time, the largest social marketing campaign to prevent sexual violence, the MyStrength Campaign, which adapted Men Can Stop Rape's programs to engage young men to stand up and speak out against sexual assault.

Based on this experience in California and throughout the United States, I offer several key principles for the United States' military to develop and implement its own efforts to prevent sexual violence.

Based on the hearings you have conducted on the issue, you are very familiar with the epidemic of sexual violence in the military. Sexual violence in the military is not unlike sexual violence in other segments of our society – it reflects not only individuals' experiences but, importantly, reflects a culture that condones sexual violence and minimizes the responsibility of all members of our society to take any action to prevent it. In this way, these cultural factors are not unique to the military, though the military has unique opportunities to address them.

Through the experiences and knowledge gained from professionals in the rape crisis centers, public health practitioners and researchers, comprehensive prevention efforts to prevent sexual violence must consider many essential elements.

When I started my involvement in this work in 1982, there was little recognition of sexual violence in our communities at large, little research regarding the prevalence of this problem, and virtually no awareness of the vast problem within the military. Over the last decade, brave women have come forward sharing their stories of being sexually assaulted, leaders in the rape prevention movement have pressed forward with stories, and congressional leaders have held hearing to highlight this under-addressed problem. This awareness of the scope and breadth of sexual violence is necessary. Yet, it is not sufficient to prevent abuse. Initial efforts to address sexual violence promoted the awareness of sexual assault and services. The military has begun to establish policies and procedures to make services available. While essential, developing services to those who have been abused is not sufficient to prevent sexual violence.

A focus on primary prevention emerged as the public health field recognized violence as a public health issue in 1980's and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began addressing sexual violence in 2001 (NCIPC, 2002). Primary prevention involves developing comprehensive strategies that stop

violence before initial perpetration or victimization, especially those that make community-level changes.

Data from a variety of research informed sexual violence prevention work. Research has identified risk factors for individual victimization, such as being female and having experienced past sexual victimization. Risk factors for individual perpetration include being male, having coercive sexual fantasies, hostility towards women, a history of childhood sexual victimization, growing up in an emotionally unsupportive family environment, and adherence to societal norms supportive of sexual violence, male superiority and male sexual entitlement (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). Currently less is known about protective factors that may reduce vulnerability to victimization and risk for perpetration. Promoting protective factors and addressing negative social and environmental contributors are important components of a public health approach to prevent sexual violence (NCIPC, 2006).

Over the last thirty years, most anti-sexual violence efforts have addressed awareness of the problems, availability of services and guidance for victims to the risks they face from potential assault. While there is value in risk reduction education, fundamentally it is insufficient to prevent actual abuse. Without proper attention to the full context of sexual assault, risk reductions activities may inappropriately hold victims of sexual assault responsible for not protecting themselves, such as “you should have not put yourself in that situation.” To address sexual violence prevention in a truly comprehensive manner, strategies to prevent its initial perpetration, known as primary prevention, must have the same level of commitment as programs that respond to its consequences. (Lee, Guy, Perry, Sniffen & Mixson, 2007)

A promising approach to prevention efforts is to use bystander intervention. Based upon an extensive evidence for other issues, many have embraced this strategy in sexual violence prevention. Instead of approaching people as potential victims or potential perpetrators of sexual violence, bystander intervention approaches community members as potential actors who can intervene in situations that contribute to an environment that may lead to sexual assault and intervene in situations that may lead to abuse. (Banyard, Plante, Moynihan, 2004)

Partnership between military and prevention practitioners is essential to enhance the armed services' efforts to prevent sexual violence. Over the last several years, Department of Defense and several branches of the military have solicited input from CALCASA and other prevention practitioners to develop prevention efforts specific to military culture. This change is more than promoting awareness, saying sexual assault is unacceptable and providing services. It requires making significant shifts in culture to promote a culture where soldiers, airmen, sailors and marines identify taking action to prevent sexual violence as a core concept of being in the military. We recognize that sexual violence is a

problem throughout our society, not only within the military services. And I expect that the armed services can make a difference to address this serious problem within its ranks, just as it made racist behavior unacceptable within its ranks.

I am heartened that there have been important steps taken to address this issue within our armed services. I am also aware of much more to do to intervene when an assault occurs as well as prevent these crimes in the first place.

Chairwoman Davis, and Ranking Member Wilson, I thank you for your attention to this issue and hope that I, and CALCASA, can be of assistance as you consider your next steps.

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