

Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to introduce members of our team:

- Ms. Nikki Sorrell, our State Sexual Assault Response Coordinator
- Ms. Serena Furnari, our Vermont Air National Guard Sexual Assault Response Coordinator
- Ms. Natasha Teston, Victim Advocate Coordinator
- Captain Brian Dodge, from our Judge Advocate General office
- Mr. Todd Connelly, our State Equal Employment Manager
- Mr. Ken Gragg, our Deputy Adjutant General
- Colonel Tracey Poirier, our Director of the Joint Staff
- Lieutenant Colonel Kate Irish, our Air National Guard Chief of Staff
- Mr. Scott Detweiler, our Integrated Violence Prevention Workforce Director
- Ms. Devin Bevins and Mr. Matthew Bouchard, specialists in our Violence Prevention Workforce

Today we will review and discuss the Vermont National Guard Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault. We will also provide information on the gender report and demographics of our National Guard.

In the four years I have been in this position, we have worked to address sexual harassment and sexual assault at multiple levels, not only in Vermont, but nationally. It remains, in my nearly 40 years of military service, one of the most caustic and damaging things I must address in our Guard. I would like one day to report we had no incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault. We are not there yet. We remain committed to eliminating both – but this is a human endeavor

and there will likely be people who make poor choices as in any other profession. It does not excuse the conduct. We have standards, and for those who engage in this sort of conduct, they simply cannot be in our Guard.

For background, about two years ago I was asked by the National Guard Bureau Vice Chief to serve as a member of the General Officer Steering Committee with four other Adjutants General. This committee provides guidance and direction to the National Guard Sexual Assault Prevention Task Force. The purpose of this task force is to completely revise the National Guard approach to addressing sexual harassment and sexual assault. I was asked to be on this steering committee due to the remarkable work our team has done to eliminate this from our Guard. We are now implementing actions incorporated in the plan along six lines of effort – Leadership; Training and Education; Culture and Climate; Communication; Partnerships and Resources.

- Vermont was in the first group of states to receive and fill the staff of our Integrated Violence Prevention Workforce. These five positions are designed to focus on prevention – which we have not historically done as well as we should have. This will pay future dividends for us and alleviates our SARCs from having to do both prevention and response.
- We are nearing completion of establishing a separate directorate in support of prevention and response. Currently, several key areas are under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel or the Human Resource Office. Providing our team their own directorate gives our key staff direct access to me.

- Last year, we hosted a series of events to highlight our efforts to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault. Ms. Sorrell will provide some details on these initiatives. This year, our theme is Step Forward, Prevent, Report and Advocate, with several events throughout April – Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month.
- I invited MAJ Bridget Flannery from the South Dakota National Guard to present her innovative approach to sexual assault - Buddy Aid – treating sexual harassment and sexual assault as a kinetic threat – as we would in combat. Earlier this month, Major Flannery came to Vermont to present her program to our senior leaders. This innovative approach provides immediate actions to prevent sexual assault, and to care for victims. It also prepares our members at all levels to present “hard targets” by destigmatizing the conversation around sexual assault and incorporating the approach into daily operations.
- You will note the increase in reports, informal and formal, of sexual harassment last year. While some may view this as a negative trend, I believe the opposite is true. In 2021, we had zero reports – which was true for years. I am not naïve. That is not an indication it didn’t happen – they were either addressed at the unit level and not reported, or not reported at all. Since that last report, we changed our policy and approach, simplifying guidance to our members on the reporting process, and working to reduce barriers to access resources. I believe this increase in reports is a result of two things – unit leaders are doing the right thing and reporting incidents to our State Equal Employment Manager, and our members coming forward when it happens.

I would like to provide Ms. Sorrell the opportunity to review the contents of the annual report with you.