

## TAG Opening Remarks (FY 18 Report):

Good Afternoon. Thank you for inviting us here again this year to present to you our legislative report on sexual assault, gender discrimination and discrimination based upon sexual orientation. We will also present the Military Women's Program Annual Gender Report. Although not in statute we feel it's appropriate to share our hard work on gender diversity with the legislature.

As most of you are aware, this is our sixth report since the Governor signed into law the requirement for the Vermont National Guard to provide an annual report regarding these very important issues.

Before I turn this over to my subject matter experts who will provide you with summary presentations on the reports, I want to take a few minutes to highlight some of the work we have done over the last few years. I also want to address the characterizations of our organization in the media over the last few months and state my complete disagreement with those assertions. Comments like "the Guard is stuck in the 1950's" or that "the leadership is in denial" are hurtful to our organization. Our current analysis and efforts to continuously improve our organization are data driven and evidence based. They do not support the accusations and the dedicated men and women of the Vermont National Guard take exception to those accusations.

The truth is the Vermont Military Women's Program has been an active affinity group for over a decade as part of our Joint Diversity Executive Council. In 2011 the Military Women's Program coordinated the largest ever one day conference for Vt. Guard Women. Over 350 women attended to discuss the issues for women in the guard. Twenty-One recommendations were developed at the conference as part of our strategic diversity plan to increase the representation of women and ensure they have equal opportunities to pursue their professional goals in the Guard.

One of the recommendations was to report annually the representation of women. Through the years the report has continuously grown providing a variety of perspectives on the representation of women in each rank, occupation and command status. This thorough look presented to Senior Leaders and discussed with the JDEC has enabled us to develop a gender gap analysis. The analysis studies the barriers for under-representation and ways to break down the barriers. Five years ago we augmented the Military Women's Program by standing-up the Cultural Transformation Task Force. The purpose of the task force was to increase

the operational effectiveness of the VTNG by cultivating and committing to an organizational climate of equality and professional respect.

Three focus areas were developed based on the Military Women's Program 21 recommendations. One; assignment of women in the combat arms units and occupations, two; a continuation of the Military Women's Program 21 recommendations and three, additional emphasis on the prevention and response to sexual harassment and assault.

For the past five years the Military Women's Program has reported to our Joint Diversity Executive Committee quarterly and generated an annual report. Gender equality and been a strategic imperative integrated into our overall State Strategic Plan and specifically our Diversity Strategic Plan. We have been recognized nationally as a leader of change regarding gender equality issues. While there is no right end state, I am confident the initiatives are moving the Vermont National Guard forward.

There are a multitude of complicated reasons why the VTNG continues to have an under-representation of women in the Guard. The Defense Advisory Council for Women in the Services, along with other internal Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programs, have implemented policies to improve the number of opportunities for women. Our team has been diligently aligning our work around the changes.

In 2017, the MeToo movement raised the awareness of the prevalence of sexual harassment in our society. Our Military Women's Program has long pointed out the correlation between sexism at its earliest offense along the spectrum of harm to the crimes of sexual assault and the impasse for gender equality. Our service members don't want to work in a sexist culture. Sexism is an endemic problem and a challenge across our country and in every organization. The VTNG is not perfect nor absent of sexism in spite of well-intended commitment to diversity and equal opportunity.

The Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Program has significantly helped survivors. Policies for these programs have established accountability processes and safety networks for advocacy. Our focus now is on the prevention of sex-based offense and specifically early on, when much of the bias is unconscious or unintentional. The issues related to combatting sexism and improving gender equality are a priority for our overall readiness and are integrated into our core values.

Because the VTNG has invested in measuring gender equality and the issues related to under-representation, we have implemented policies, trainings, observances and outreach which has been nationally recognized and adopted. We will continue with these strategies.

Our 2018 Gender Report will be provided for your review and I am confident you will recognize the tireless commitment of our JDEC to create a culture where diversity is valued as a readiness issue.

It is the objective of the Equal Opportunity program to formulate, direct, and sustain a comprehensive effort which ensures fair treatment of all members based on merit, fitness, and capability that supports readiness. I have Doris Sumner again this year to provide an overview of the program, statistical data and her program's accomplishments.

As mentioned in our press conference in early December the VTNG will institute several changes to increase transparency of sexual assault reporting as well as shifting our format of compliance based training to direct leadership engagement on prevention efforts.

I would now like to introduce Scott Detweiler – he is our full-time Sexual Assault Response Coordinator – who, has served in this program since 2014. Scott and his team are fully integrated into the civilian networks throughout the state of Vermont for community engagement. Several of those community partners are here with us today. He will provide you with an overview of the statistical data for Fiscal Year 2018, and our status with the implementation of strategic prevention initiatives.

Again, thank you.

SUBMITTED 22 JAN 19

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