

## Pentagon to Make Sexual Harassment a Crime Under UCMJ



Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Medical Department Activity Bavaria, conducts its annual Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention, or SHARP, Stand-Down Day at Rose Barracks, Vilseck, Germany, April 18, 2019. (U.S. Army photo/Alain M. Polynice)

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Military.com | By [Patricia Kime](#)

Ahead of the release Thursday of a damning report showing an increase in sexual assault against female service members, Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan announced in a memo sent Wednesday to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top leaders, Shanahan said that sexual harassment will become a stand-alone crime under the UCMJ. Currently, threatening behavior falls under Article 120, Rape, Sexual Assault and other Sexual Misconduct.

Read the memo:

[ACTIONS TO ADDRESS AND PREVENT SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY OSD004373-19.pdf](#)

The acting secretary also plans to launch a program to flush out serial offenders called CATCH that will encourage personnel who work with victims, such as advocates, legal counsel and sexual-assault response coordinators, to encourage them to report their cases in an effort to identify repeat offenders.

The moves are designed to eliminate a culture that allows harassment and undermines good order and discipline. Shanahan said military personnel must treat "each other with dignity and respect and hold ourselves and each other, more accountable."

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- [Brass Call for More Accountability to Stop Sexual Assault at Military Academies](#)
- [Sexual Assaults Rise Nearly 50 Percent at Service Academies](#)

"To put it bluntly, we are not performing to the standards and expectations we have for ourselves or for each other. This is unacceptable. We cannot shrink from facing the challenge head on," he said.

The Defense Department is expected to release a report Thursday that says the number of sexual assaults against men in the military has remained the same or declined slightly, but assaults against women have increased since 2016, according to survey results and actual reports.

Shanahan announced the creation of the Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force on March 27, the day after a Pentagon advisory committee released a report that found disparities in documentation of sexual-assault case across the services.

Earlier this year, the Defense Department also released a report on sexual assaults at the service academies that found the number of incidents of unwanted sexual contact had increased by 47 percent in two years.

Per the task force recommendations, the military services also have been directed to improve training for officers and noncommissioned officers regarding prevention and response to sexual assault and harassment.

They will execute what's known as the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention Plan of Action, which will focus on prevention strategies. And the Defense Department will develop new climate assessment tools to identify what is going on in units that allows sexual harassment and assault to occur.

Finally, Shanahan said, the services must "select recruits of the highest character." According to Shanahan, the DoD Accession Policy Directorate will work with the services to "validate and implement (as applicable) measures to improve assessment of military applicants."

"Collectively, we must do everything we can to eliminate sexual harassment and assault in the military. In doing so, we must provide the highest-quality response to service members and hold offenders appropriately accountable," Shanahan said.

The changes are to be implemented by Sept. 20, 2019, according to the memo.

The Defense Department will release the Fiscal 2018 Report on Sexual Assault in the Military at Thursday at 11:30 a.m. Eastern.

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