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Testimony to the
House Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Hearing on
Shattered Families, Shattered Service:
Taking Military Domestic Violence Out of the Shadows
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Good Afternoon, Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is David Lee, the Director of Prevention at [PreventConnect](#) – a national online resource center dedicated to advancing prevention of domestic violence, sexual violence and teen dating violence. PreventConnect is a national project of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA). Since 2005, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, PreventConnect has led national efforts to build comprehensive prevention strategies that focus on preventing domestic and sexual violence before they take place. It is essential to respond to the needs of survivors in a trauma-informed manner, assert the dignity of all people, and to hold those who have committed abuse accountable. However, those responses *after* violence has occurred are not sufficient to prevent such forms of violence from happening in the first place, nor are they sufficient to prevent them from happening in the future. Only with an intentional investment in prevention, will we be able to change the culture that creates the conditions which allow domestic violence, and other forms of violence, to continue, to a culture that is free from domestic violence and other forms of violence.

Domestic violence is a significant and widespread problem in our society. About 1 in 4 women (25.1% or 30.0 million) and 1 in 10 men (10.9% or 12.1 million) in the U.S. experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of intimate partner violence-related impact.¹ When addressing domestic violence, it is crucial to note the impacts such as being fearful, concerned for safety, injury, need for medical care, needed help from law enforcement, missed work, missed school, any post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, need for housing services, need for victim advocate services, need for legal services and contacting a crisis hotline.

In a 2013 CDC study of data collected in 2010, 28.4% of active duty women and 26.9% of wives of active duty men experienced lifetime physical violence by an intimate partner. Active duty women who

¹ Smith, S.G., Zhang, X., Basile, K.C., Merrick, M.T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M., Chen, J. (2018). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief – Updated Release. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

were deployed during the three years prior to the survey were significantly more likely to experience lifetime physical violence by an intimate partner compared to active duty women who were not deployed during the three years prior to the survey.² In FY18, there were a total of 8,039 incidents of domestic abuse reported to Family Advocacy Program.³ This number reflects only those cases that were reported to FAP and met the criteria for domestic violence. This is an undercount of the actual level of domestic violence as typically, most domestic violence is not reported.⁴ In many incidents of domestic violence, sexual assault has also taken place. The root causes of domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment are similar, so it is valuable to understand all of these forms of gender-based violence in the armed services. In FY18, there were 6053 reported cases of sexual assault among service members. In addition, using an anonymous survey, the Department of Defense estimated 20,500 service members experienced sexual assault.⁵ This data underscores the need to take action regarding gender-based violence in the armed services.

I am pleased that today we are addressing both survivor perspectives and prevention strategies for our nation's armed services. These are essential to move forward and create the change that is necessary to build a nation, including its armed services, free from domestic violence. Advancing prevention cannot be done alone; it requires a community to learn with each other and from each other. It also requires much more than mere awareness: prevention is about creating a culture that challenges violence and the behaviors and attitudes which contribute to it. As an example, we could not prevent sexual violence without also preventing sexual harassment and the associated attitudes that sustain gender inequity.

Domestic violence is not an armed services problem; it is a societal problem that takes place in all of our nation's institutions, including the armed services. All institutions, including education, faith communities, sport, business, and military must address the role they can play in supporting domestic violence prevention. In CALCASA's 2015 report *Reciprocal Advancement: Building Linkages Between Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault*⁶, we use the term "linked, yet distinct" to describe the relationship between domestic violence and sexual violence. Domestic violence, sexual violence, and sexual harassment all share many common risk and protective factors.⁷ While the response after each takes

² Black, MC, Merrick, MY (2013) Technical Report Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and Stalking among Active Duty Women and Wives of Active Duty Men— Comparisons with Women in the U.S. General Population, 2010. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control.

³ Department of Defense, Report on Child Abuse and Neglect and Domestic Abuse in the Military for Fiscal Year 2018 (ND) <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/fap-fy18-dod-report.pdf>

⁴ Reaves, Brian A. (2017). Police Response to Domestic Violence, 2006-2015. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5907&utm_source=juststats&utm_medium=email&utm_content=prdv0615_report_detail_page&utm_campaign=prdv0615&ed2f26df2d9c416fbddddd2330a778c6=lohfkfgfkz-lktztdoo

⁵ Department of Defense, Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Fiscal Year 2018 (2019) https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/DoD_Annual_Report_on_Sexual_Assault_in_the_Military.pdf

⁶ Aldridge, L, Reciprocal Advancement: Building Linkages Between Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (2015) Sacramento, CA: California Coalition Against Sexual Assault. http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CALCASA-BSU-FieldsRep_FINAL.pdf

⁷ Wilkins, N., Tsao, B., Hertz, M., Davis, R., Klevens, J. (2014). Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Oakland, CA: Prevention Institute.

place will differ, prevention efforts for all of these forms of gender based violence are linked and should be aligned to maximize their impact.

The armed services with all of its branches provide both opportunities and challenges for preventing domestic violence. The armed services are value-based entities – they are dedicated to building a common culture dedicated to fulfilling their mission. While this culture can reinforce norms that support domestic violence (such as male domination, rewarding physical aggression and using unit cohesion to fail to address sexual violence), the armed services have the opportunity to create a culture in which domestic violence is not tolerated, where bystanders speak up to support their fellow armed service members in preventing violence and harassment (not in colluding).

For over 25 years, my work in preventing sexual violence and domestic violence has included work with the armed services. I have seen a shift as Congress has prioritized addressing these forms of violence, as the public and the military has acknowledged the problem of gender-based violence, and as leadership can increase its commitment. Yet, the problem is still pervasive and it is time to dedicate focus to go beyond responding to violence, and move toward an institutional commitment to prevention. We cannot limit prevention efforts to posters and Domestic Violence Awareness Month events in October.

The Department of Defense’s 2018 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military describes the current state of sexual assault prevention in the military as “[h]istorically, activities aimed at preventing sexual assault have primarily centered on raising awareness about the crime. These approaches have likely contributed to increases in victim reporting and use of support services, but civilian sector research suggests awareness programming does not translate into the kinds of long-term behavior changes required to prevent sexual violence at the organizational level.”

While headlines covering the DOD’s 2018 report focused on a 37% increase of some kind of sexual violence as compared to 2016, the Department also released its Prevention Plan of Action for 2019-2023.⁸ The Prevention Plan of Action recognizes the limitations of existing prevention efforts in the military, and provides a framework to increase its investment in prevention. Naturally, the success of the military in reducing sexual violence depends on how well they are able to prevent it, and these prevention strategies can also extend to the prevention of domestic violence.

The Prevention Plan of Action has established many goals to create the human resources, infrastructure and processes necessary for effective prevention efforts. First, it describes the importance of a committed and invested leadership team that can oversee, implement and set the ground-work for the organization in regards to preventing violence. This is crucial as it is a means of equipping oversight and leadership for the remainder of the workforce with prevention and response responsibilities -- building on a greater sense of communal strength and responsibility. The system also encourages collaborative and engaging partnerships with prevention efforts on other topics. In addition, sexual violence prevention efforts can be strengthened by collaborating with local, state and national civilian sexual violence prevention efforts to build cohesive prevention messages and programs that will reinforce each other.

⁸ Department of Defense, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, Prevention Plan of Action 2019-2023, <https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/PPoA%20Final.pdf>

Infrastructure data and resources are crucial to know what is working and what is not having an impact. A sustainable program of research is needed to better understand factors that contribute to sexual assault and domestic violence, methods to identify prevention factors that mitigate those factors and prevention metrics. Regarding domestic violence response, those efforts are reflected in reporting on the Department of Defense's Family Advocacy Program, which tracks the number of incidents of domestic abuse reported, but does not offer a path forward for prevention. Thus, it is important to learn lessons from the work of sexual violence prevention, both in military and non-military settings, in order to gather a strong understanding of what can work.

Since sexual violence and domestic violence share many risk and protective factors, the armed services prevention efforts need to be aligned. Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Offices and Family Advocacy Program, as well of those responsible to preventing sexual harassment must plan and coordinate how their prevention efforts will share a common language and complement each other.

Preventing gender-based violence requires partnership between the armed services and civilian efforts. Over the last 14 years, PreventConnect is an online gathering of prevention practitioners where we have learned much about the science and practice of prevention. Thousands of people share their experiences doing prevention work, learn about the newest prevention resources and research, and strengthen their collective knowledge of how prevention works. The armed services can learn from other prevention efforts, such as those on college campuses and with youth. PreventConnect will continue to share resources and lessons learned in the practice of domestic violence sexual violence prevention. We welcome those working to prevent violence in all settings, including the military, to participate in PreventConnect activities in order to develop, implement, evaluate and strengthen their prevention practices.

We are also proud of our ability to forge new opportunities in prevention work by connecting with organizations and entities with a greater capacity to influence change. One such group in the world of domestic violence prevention is the Blue Shield Foundation of California, whom we have partnered with for several years now. Blue Shield Foundation of California's 2019 report *A Life Course Framework for Preventing Domestic Violence*⁹ describes strategies to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of family violence. This report highlights the drivers of domestic violence: Situational factors (immediate or near-immediate causes of violent events), Life course and developmental factors (the ecological contexts, experiences, outcomes, and individual factors across the lifespan that increase or decrease the chances that a person will engage in abuse toward intimate partners); and Structural and cultural factors (that explain domestic violence at the social and cultural levels and are reflections of cultural norms.) Prevention efforts should address these drivers of domestic violence.

Life course analyses demonstrate how health is a consequence of multiple determinants and contexts that change as a person develops. The timing and sequence of biological, psychological, cultural, and

⁹ Blue Shield of California Foundation, Report: A Life Course Framework for Preventing Domestic Violence (2019) San Francisco, CA: Blue Shield of California Foundation
<https://blueshieldcafoundation.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloadable/BreakingtheCycleLifeCourseFramework.pdf>

historical events and experiences influence the health and development of both individuals and populations. Through a life course analysis, we can begin to better understand the points in a person’s life at which we can most effectively break the cycle of domestic violence. The synthesis of this work reinforces some of what is known from public health research and what is emergent in child trauma and brain development science fields. It also uncovers many important insights:

- Domestic violence is far too common in the lives of men and women, and far too many children witness violent assaults between their parents.
- Serious negative health and developmental consequences for children and teens follow in the wake of exposure to domestic violence incidents.
- Children below the ages of five are disproportionately exposed to trauma of various kinds compared to older children.
- Teenagers who have experienced violence in the home in the past or concurrent with exposure to violence in teen dating relationships are at an elevated risk for a variety of negative health and social outcomes.
- Intergenerational framing for understanding and promoting practice innovation is a promising approach for future efforts to end domestic violence.

Intergenerational poverty, housing insecurity, overreliance on punitive solutions, family separation, and anti-immigrant discrimination are structural factors that perpetuate the cycle of violence and often silence many vulnerable children, families, and communities.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2017 publication *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*¹⁰ highlights strategies and approaches that have demonstrated evidence of preventing domestic violence, reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors associated with domestic violence. (See table labelled Preventing IPV for a summary.) I will highlight several key strategies:

- **Engage Influential Adults and Peers:** The CDC highlighted prevention programs that “encourage men and boys to support actual and potential victims by intervening and speaking out, but also teach skills and promote social norms that reduce their own risk for

Preventing IPV	
Strategy	Approach
Teach safe and healthy relationship skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social-emotional learning programs for youth • Healthy relationship programs for couples
Engage influential adults and peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men and boys as allies in prevention • Bystander empowerment and education • Family-based programs
Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood home visitation • Preschool enrichment with family engagement • Parenting skill and family relationship programs • Treatment for at-risk children, youth and families
Create protective environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve school climate and safety • Improve organizational policies and workplace climate • Modify the physical and social environments of neighborhoods
Strengthen economic supports for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen household financial security • Strengthen work-family supports
Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim-centered services • Housing programs • First responder and civil legal protections • Patient-centered approaches • Treatment and support for survivors of IPV, including TDV

¹⁰ Niolon, P. H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

future perpetration.” We must reexamine masculinity to create manhood that is dedicated toward promoting gender equity, not dominance. For the armed services, we should draw upon the lessons learned in prevention efforts in sport and fraternities for examples of prevention efforts. Bystander empowerment and intervention “promote social norms that are protective against violence and empower and encourage people to intervene to prevent violence when they see it.” These programs have begun to be implemented in colleges, high schools and in the armed services.

- **Disrupt the Developmental Pathways Toward Partner Violence:** These strategies and approaches are aligned with the recommendations from Blue Shield Foundation of California’s *A Life Course Framework for Preventing Domestic Violence* described above. The armed services can explore how its Family Advocacy Program efforts to work with the entire family.
- **Create Protective Environments:** Several of the recommendations focus on improving the climate and physical environment of schools and workplaces. The armed services can take efforts informed by school-based and workplace-based initiatives to make shifts to its culture to enhance safety and feelings of safety, promotes healthy relationships and respectful boundaries, and reduces tolerance for violence among military personnel and officers.
- **Strengthen Economic Supports for Families:** The CDC report said that “Evidence suggests that poverty, financial stress, and low income can increase risk for IPV. Reducing financial stress may decrease potential for relationship conflict and dissatisfaction, which are strong predictors of IPV.” Efforts that strengthen household financial security and family work supports (such as family leave) are part of a comprehensive effort to prevent domestic violence.

Domestic violence shatters family and adversely affects the capacity of the armed services. With an investment in prevention, we can make a difference in the lives of service members, their families and the community. As we continue the journey toward prevention, we hope to engage with all our partners to create conversations that generate new pathways, partnerships, and innovations to advance a long-term vision for a world that is not just free from violence, but also abundant in opportunity for healthy relationships, healthy families, and healthy communities.

Equipped with an expanded capacity for understanding the risk and protective factors associated with domestic violence, we are moving closer towards a world where we can prevent domestic violence and related forms of violence. PreventConnect will continue the critical work of identifying emerging prevention strategies and connecting key players in the world of preventing violence with each other. This kind of network is crucial to preserving knowledge and maintaining positive momentum towards building our collective capacity on prevention, and what we’ve found works outside the world of the military can yield important lessons for within it.

Thank you.

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