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**EXAMINING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**  
**OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**  
**AT THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**

**COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**  
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**Introduction**

Thank you, Chairman Cox, ranking member Gohmert, and committee members for allowing me to testify before you today. I am here to discuss NOAA's efforts to address and prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment, or "SASH," as well as NOAA's unique and ongoing challenges in meeting this goal.

NOAA's Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program is the center of expertise with regard to sexual assault and sexual harassment. The program is working to set up agency-wide prevention services, and to establish victim advocacy for the agency. Victim advocacy is a unique facet of legislation requiring NOAA to respond to SASH issues, and NOAA will be the first civilian Federal agency to have embedded victim advocates, providing a critical service to our entire organization.

To understand SASH issues within NOAA, you must first understand the specific risk factors NOAA faces. For one, NOAA has a decentralized and a complex workforce. NOAA's workforce spans over 600 locations in all U.S. states and territories, and is routinely deployed on ships and planes in state, federal, and international waters. Moreover, within these

dispersed geographic locations are isolated workplaces with limited resources. Finally, NOAA is in the midst of a generational shift within its workforce.

Nothing typifies the convergence of all three of these risk factors better than fisheries observers. These approximately 851 contractors and privately employed biologists are placed on commercial fishing vessels and tasked with collecting an independent fisheries catch and bycatch data along with recording fishing activities. While fishery observers are deployed in state, federal, and international waters around the country, they spend the most time at sea in Alaska, where they may be contracted to work on vessels for up to 90 days. The job of a fisheries observer isn't easy as they work alongside fishermen in stressful, strenuous, and hazardous conditions. Observers are often viewed as outsiders with oversight responsibilities. Therefore, they are at a high risk for bullying and intimidation, sexual and physical harassment, and violence.

Regional Observer Programs (ROPs) coordinates with NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) to train fisheries observers to recognize and report any type of harassment. ROPs also ensure satellite phones or other independent communication devices such as In-Reach or Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) are available for observers seeking help. In the unfortunate event of sexual assault or harassment, ROPs provide NOAA SASH resources to observers.

While fisheries observers remain one of the highest-risk populations for sexual harassment or assault, there are others who experience harassment and assault in NOAA's fleet and research vessels, offices and other Agency facilities. For these employees, sexual harassment creates a daily struggle that interferes with their personal and professional lives and costs the Agency in a myriad of ways. The psychological effects of sexual assault and sexual

harassment have a profound impact on a victim's professional development, performance, and overall physical and emotional well-being. Organizationally, these incidents create a culture of low morale, have economic impacts, and compromise the integrity of the Agency's mission and science.

To achieve a measureable reduction in sexual assault and harassment, NOAA's Workplace Violence program has focused on three strategic goals and has received additional resources. These goals are in line with both the 2016 EEOC's *Select Task Force on Harassment in the Workforce* and the 2018 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine study, *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*.

The three goals developed for NOAA's Workplace Violence program focused on a streamlined response, and include:

1. Full-time regional victim advocates embedded in all major regional campuses across NOAA;
2. Comprehensive prevention services; and,
3. Leadership education and engagement to increase competency and comfort around addressing harassment.

To achieve these goals while addressing NOAA's unique challenges, we procured six contracts with the leading organizations in the field for bystander intervention, victim advocacy, computer-based training, and overall prevention in sexual assault and sexual harassment in the workplace.

One contract, with STAR (Standing Together Against Rape), specifically focuses on providing services for NOAA staff in Alaska. The STAR contract allows any NOAA employee, contractor, or affiliate to specifically reach out to STAR to receive victim advocacy services. This includes the traditional services of crisis intervention, emotional support, and connection to additional resources. It also includes expanded services of hotel accommodations and follow-up telephonic support.

To undertake the agency's prevention and assessment needs, we contracted with Soteria Solutions. Soteria Solutions, known for its "Bringing in the Bystander" product, is an international leader in sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention. They are working with NOAA on a targeted assessment via focus groups. From this assessment, Soteria will produce a suite of prevention products that will include bystander intervention for the highest risk areas of the agency for 2020.

A third contract is with EverFi, a leading computer-based trainer, specializing in sexual harassment prevention. This contractor will provide foundational training to the entire NOAA workforce. I announced EverFi's computer-based training this month via an all-hands message. A one-hour version of this training is mandatory for all NOAA employees, and a more comprehensive two-hour version is mandatory for all NOAA supervisors. This training incorporates the NOAA SASH policy, interactive components, and video.

The scope of the issues at NOAA demands a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy that requires dedicated, full-time staff to execute it successfully. To date, we have only full-time employee at NOAA in the workplace violence prevention program. However, in January of this year, two NOAA employees were assigned to work in the program on a one-year detail.

Additionally, two critical full staff positions have been advertised, and interviews have been conducted and selections made, although we do not yet have firm on-boarding dates. Along with an FY21 request of \$1.7M over the base of \$1.0M, this upcoming infusion of staffing resources will allow NOAA's workplace violence prevention program to continue to mature. NOAA also continues to develop innovative ways to tackle sexual harassment and sexual assault. For example, NOAA has created a Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment Council that is chaired by the Deputy Under Secretary for Operations and includes senior NOAA leaders with equities in the SASH arena. The Council meets monthly and engages stakeholders on the topic to track data, trends, and prevention initiatives.

Moreover, NOAA continues to train its workforce and will be providing cutting-edge education from leaders in the field of sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention, diversity and inclusion, and civility via an upcoming summit this fall. This summit will provide in-person training to NOAA's leadership, general workforce, and practitioners in the field of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and diversity and inclusion. Live-streamed panels, workshops, and webinars from the summit will be available to the entire NOAA workforce.

More remains to be done. Although we recently have made significant strides, I commit that our Agency will continue to prioritize its efforts in the prevention and response to sexual harassment and assault. We will ensure the foundation we've started building remains strong and lasting. The workforce deserves no less. I thank you for your attention to this important topic and for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any follow up questions.