

Dunbar to resign after report showing Wis. National Guard mishandled sexual assault, harassment allegations

Posted on Monday, Dec 9, 2019

The Wisconsin National Guard created its own arm to investigate allegations of sexual harassment and assault in violation of state and federal law, according to a report released Monday afternoon.

After reviewing the report on how the Wisconsin National Guard botched the handling of assault and harassment allegations, Gov. Tony Evers called for and received the resignation of Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, who has been adjutant general since 2007.

Evers vowed “top-to-bottom changes to ensure a safe workplace in the guard” that is free of sexual assault and harassment or the fear of retaliation for filing a report. The resignation of Dunbar is effective Dec. 31.

“New leadership is also needed to successfully implement these reforms,” said Evers, who signed an executive order implementing changes recommended in the 88-page report.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

The probe conducted by the National Guard Bureau’s Office of Complex Investigations found the state unit’s policies for handling assault and harassment allegations were “non-compliant with federal law” and resulted in “numerous, significant deficiencies that compromised the accuracy and legality of the investigations.” The move also shielded the Wisconsin National Guard from scrutiny

by state and federal officials.

Under current policy, the Office of Complex Investigations is supposed to investigate reports of sexual assault. Instead, the Wisconsin National Guard used its internal process to handle 22 of the 35 reports of sexual assault it received between May 1, 2009, and May 31, 2019.

The move to handle investigations from within created “internal, command-driven” probes, according to the report.

The decision was found to be a “direct violation” of Department of Defense policies and practices, and the probe found the move “negatively impacted” the quality and legality of sexual assault investigations. This, in turn, meant the credibility of the investigations “suffered to the detriment of all parties.”

OCI investigators in the report present 21 recommendations to address the issues, including calling on the Wisconsin National Guard to stop conducting internal investigations into allegations of sexual assault and to update its policies to prevent “command-directed” probes in the future.

The report also calls on the Wisconsin National Guard to update its written policies to comply with federal law, implement internal controls to “better manage the administration of discipline” and centralize all military justice records.

Evers in an executive order issued as the report was released directed the Wisconsin National Guard to develop a plan to “faithfully implement” each of the 21 recommendations within 60 days.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin joined Evers in March in calling for a review of Guard procedures following media reports of botched investigations and retaliation against those who spoke up. She said the report shows the Guard failed to provide “leadership of unmatched integrity and a work environment free of sexual assault, harassment and the fear of retaliation.”

“The failure of leadership, wrongdoing, and lack of accountability that has been uncovered demands change at the Wisconsin National Guard, including new leadership and implementing all of the report’s recommendations on how best to prevent sexual assault and harassment, and confront it with accountability when it occurs,” said Baldwin, D-Madison.

Dunbar and Guard leaders were briefed on the report's findings Saturday. Ahead of its public release, Dunbar vowed to implement the changes, saying, "Sexual misconduct has no place in the Wisconsin National Guard." A Wisconsin National Guard spokeswoman didn't immediately return a call seeking comment on the report's details.

Dunbar was first appointed to the post in 2007 by then-Gov. Jim Doyle. He was then reappointed to new five-year terms by Gov. Scott Walker in 2012 and 2017. He joined the Air Force in 1983 and then the Washington Air National Guard in 1991. He came to Wisconsin in 2005 to command Milwaukee's 128th Air Refueling Wing.

Evers indicated Brig. Gen. Dary Ebben will serve as the head of the Wisconsin National Guard on an interim basis after Dec. 31, and the process to find a permanent replacement will begin "in the coming weeks."

Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, said in a statement she appreciated "the swift action by Gov. Evers, Sen. Baldwin and the National Guard Bureau" in their review and handling of the situation.

"This report is just the beginning of a long road ahead," Shilling said. "I encourage other individuals who have experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment or retaliation to report their concerns and help to ensure that justice is served."

See the report:

https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WI-Assessment-Release-9-Dec-19_Redacted.pdf

See the National Guard statement:

<https://dma.wi.gov/DMA/news/2019news/19201>

See Evers' order:

https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/WIGOV/2019/12/09/file_attachments/1339698/E0062WisconsinNationalGuard.pdf

Shilling's statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/191209SHILLING.pdf>