

Evers, Baldwin call for review of Wis. National Guard's sexual misconduct policies

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Gov. Tony Evers and U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin want a review of the Wisconsin National Guard's sexual assault and harassment policies.

The pair sent separate letters to the National Guard Bureau's Office of Complex Investigations Thursday requesting the office also look into the state National Guard's process for investigating those allegations.

The request comes as some Wisconsin National Guard members have come forward with allegations of sexual misconduct. One female guard member wrote to Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald in January that her sergeant had sexually harassed her and her colleagues. But the complaints weren't properly investigated, according to AP.

Evers wrote in his letter Thursday a review of the state National Guard's handling of past sexual misconduct cases would "help us ensure the safety of men and women" serving.

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"As should be the case in all workplaces, the service members of the Wisconsin National Guard deserve a work environment free from sexual assault and harassment, fear of retaliation for reporting sexual assault and harassment when it occurs, and inadequate accountability for perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment," Evers wrote.

Wisconsin National Guard spokesman Joe Trovato said the Guard will provide the Office of Complex Investigations any information their officials ask for and that he

looks “forward to the opportunity to work together toward continuous improvement.”

He added the National Guard takes all sexual misconduct allegations seriously and maintains “a robust program focused on protecting victims” and educating members, while working to “create a culture that encourages reporting inappropriate behavior immediately.”

“Our first priority is ensuring victims are protected, treated with dignity and respect, and provided support, advocacy and care, but we also use all available resources to investigate crimes and pursue justice,” he said.

Thursday’s news comes after Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, last month sent a letter to Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar requesting details on the National Guard’s sexual harassment and assault policies and recommendations to strengthen them.

Dunbar last week in a four-page response wrote there’s a “zero-tolerance policy” regarding those offenses. Individuals can either confidentially disclose an assault allegation without kicking off an investigation or file an “unrestricted report,” which is then referred to the state Department of Justice, per the letter. From there, Guard members could be charged with a crime under the Wisconsin Code of Military Justice.

In cases of sexual harassment, allegations are handled by a commander. Punishments may include loss of rank, letters of reprimand or being let go from the National Guard, Dunbar wrote.

“The best way to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment is to avoid it, and we seek to do that through training and standards,” he wrote. “We have the highest standards, which are centered on core values associated with our parent service.”

Dunbar also wrote the National Guard has “an extensive program that fosters an environment of trust” and is committed to eliminating sexual assault and harassment within its ranks.

Fitzgerald, who retired from the U.S. Army Reserve in 2009 as a lieutenant colonel, said in a statement he still has concerns about the sexual assault and harassment procedures, as well as their enforcement. And he said he’s directed his staff to work with the gov’s office regarding Dunbar’s response.

Evers in a separate release announcing his and Baldwin's letters said he's been in touch with both Fitzgerald's and Baldwin's offices on the issue.

"I appreciate their leadership and know they share my belief that an independent review of Wisconsin's National Guard's past responses, current protocols, and recommendations for best practices will help us ensure the safety of the men and women in our National Guard," he said.

See Evers' letter [here](#).

See Baldwin's [here](#).

See Fitzgerald's letter [here](#).

See Dunbar's response [here](#).