

Gov. Evers: Announces Wisconsin National Guard completes OCI requirements after making improvements in Sexual Assault Response Programs

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers announced today that the National Guard Bureau Office of Complex Investigations (OCI) officially closed out its assessment of the Wisconsin National Guard's sexual assault and harassment prevention and response programs this month.

"Everyone should feel safe and supported in the workplace, and that includes our service members who are sacrificing so much in service to our state and country," said Gov. Evers. "They deserve our protection and our support and I am glad the Wisconsin National Guard has moved forward expeditiously to implement positive changes and build a culture that does not tolerate harassment and assault in the Guard. We will continue to work together to ensure our service members can carry out their important mission free of sexual assault and harassment or the fear of retaliation for reporting misconduct when it happens."

The 18-month collaborative effort between the Wisconsin National Guard and National Guard Bureau not only addressed program deficiencies, but ultimately resulted in a stronger and more resilient organization, according to a letter from Maj. Gen. Giselle M. Wilz, the director of staff at National Guard Bureau.

In [December 2019](#), the Office of Complex Investigations completed an assessment that began in [April 2019](#) and resulted in 22 findings and 21 recommendations in five areas, including: sexual assault prevention and response program implementation and management, sexual assault investigations, sexual harassment and equal opportunity program implementation, accountability through administrative and disciplinary actions, and command climate.

The Wisconsin National Guard immediately began incorporating those recommendations into its programs and began working with a National Guard Implementation Team to develop 39 tasks aimed at improving the Wisconsin National Guard's sexual assault and harassment reporting procedures, investigation protocols, and accountability measures.

"The Wisconsin National Guard's vigilance in completing these tasks during a tumultuous time in our nation's history is a notable achievement," Wilz wrote in her letter.

The plan called for strict compliance with federal regulations and guidance, supplemented by Wisconsin National Guard-developed processes that ensured proper reporting, investigation, accountability, and support for survivors. Highlights of the plan included full Wisconsin National Guard implementation of National Guard Bureau and Department of Defense policies, regulations, and instructions including specific provisions that refer all allegations of sexual assault to local law enforcement and National Guard Bureau's judge advocate and the Office of Complex Investigations.

In addition, the Wisconsin National Guard developed two new sets of program instructions as part of the plan – one focused on sexual assault reporting, investigation, and accountability, and another focused on sexual harassment reporting, investigation, and accountability. The plan also called for the establishment of Case Management Groups established both at the wing and major subordinate command level and the state level. Chaired by senior commanders at the Air Guard's wing and Army Guard's major subordinate command level, and by the deputy adjutants general for Army and Air at the state level, the groups include representatives from the inspector general, equal employment opportunity office, sexual assault response coordinators, the provost marshal's office, and staff judge advocates. The group collectively provides monthly updates to leadership on current sexual assault cases and response coordination, and address sexual harassment allegations, reprisal and retaliation complaints, and other misconduct. The group also tracks and addresses key personnel vacancies, as well as training and certification deficiencies.

"Ensuring that every Soldier and Airman in the Wisconsin National Guard feels comfortable coming forward and reporting inappropriate activity has been my top priority since my first day serving as Wisconsin's adjutant general," said Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp. "Sexual assault and harassment are inconsistent with our military values, and they have no place in the Wisconsin National Guard. While I'm happy that we've implemented our improvement plan and have made significant progress, we will continue educating our force and working to prevent sexual assault from happening in the first place, while striving to create a culture where everyone feels comfortable reporting misconduct."

The official closeout marks the end of a 32-month process that included a comprehensive review of the Wisconsin National Guard's processes and procedures.

A timeline with key dates and events in the process is available below:

April 12, 2019: National Guard Bureau Office of Complex Investigations Assessment Team appointed to provide assessment findings and recommendations that could be addressed by state civilian and military leadership to improve overall health and readiness of the Wisconsin National Guard.

December 9, 2019: The Office of Complex Investigations completes its assessment and submits its findings and recommendations to the office of Gov. Tony Evers. Gov. Evers issues Executive Order 62, requiring the Wisconsin National Guard to submit a corrective action plan that implemented each of the Office of Complex Investigation's 21 recommendations to the Governor for approval no later than February 9, 2020.

February 6, 2020: Gov. Evers approves plan developed by the Wisconsin National Guard to implement improvements. Wisconsin National Guard immediately begins implementation.

May 18, 2020 - July 31, 2020: Phase I of implementation – National Guard Bureau Implementation Team on site in Wisconsin to assist with changes to policies and protocols.

Sept. 10, 2020 - Jan. 23, 2021: Phase II of implementation – Virtual implementation review. National Guard Bureau Implementation Team hands off updates to Wisconsin National Guard Implementation Team for remaining programs and changes. National Guard Bureau confirms implementation plan is complete.

August 1, 2021 - Dec. 14, 2021: Phase III – Data review and analysis. Review of key documents related to assessment and coordination with key stakeholders.

Dec. 15-17, 2021: Phase IV – Onsite interviews with key stakeholders and informal interviews with staff. Onsite observation and visual validation of required policy updates.

January 2022: Wisconsin receives letter from National Guard Bureau of official closeout.

