# Reports Show Decrease in Sexual Assaults in US Military, Pentagon Cautiously Optimistic



Reports of sexual assaults in the US military decreased for the first time in nearly a decade, according to a Pentagon report released on Thursday. In 2023, 7,266 service members reported a sexual assault, down from 7,378 in the previous year. Additionally, a confidential survey estimated that 29,061 service members experienced some type of unwanted sexual contact, a significant drop from 35,875 in 2021.

The decrease in both reports and prevalence estimates marks a reversal of an upward trend observed since 2015. The Pentagon expressed cautious optimism that its efforts to combat sexual assault and harassment are beginning to show results, though it acknowledged the exact reasons for the decrease remain unclear.

Beth Foster, executive director of the Pentagon’s Office of Force Resiliency, highlighted the department's investments in prevention and creating a healthy climate as possible factors contributing to the decline. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has made tackling sexual assault in the military a top priority since his tenure began under the Biden administration.

Significant reforms have been implemented, including the establishment of an independent review commission on sexual assault and harassment. Since December, sexual assault cases are now tried outside the chain of command by new offices of Special Trial Counsel, aiming to increase victims' confidence in reporting.

For fiscal year 2024, the Pentagon has committed over $1 billion to efforts aimed at reducing sexual assault and harassment, nearly doubling previous funding levels. Austin approved all 82 recommendations from the Independent Review Commission, directing their implementation by fiscal year 2028.