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Justice Department Announces University of Montana Police Department Has Fully Implemented Agreement to Improve Response to Reports of Sexual Assault



The Department of Justice announced today that the University of Montana Police Department (UMPD) has fully implemented the requirements of its agreement with the department to improve the UMPD's response to reports of sexual assault. The agreement, which was entered into in May 2013, resolved part of the department's comprehensive investigation of the response by the Missoula, Montana, criminal justice system and the University of Montana to sexual assault. Thomas R. Tremblay, the independent reviewer who assesses whether the terms of the agreement have been met, has determined – and the department has agreed – that the UMPD has met all of its obligations under the agreement and achieved the overall purpose of the agreement.

The purpose of the agreement between the department and the UMPD was to better protect and vindicate the rights of sexual assault victims by transforming the UMPD's response to reports of sexual assault. To do this, the agreement required significant changes to the UMPD's policies, practices and supervision. These changes promote more reliable sexual assault investigations, and effective, nondiscriminatory law enforcement and community support for victims, the police department and its officers. The UMPD's implementation of the agreement has resulted in a host of historic advances in the Missoula response to sexual assault, including the following:

- development and institution of model policies and protocols for the UMPD's response to reports of sexual assault, and for its communication and cooperation with its university and local law enforcement partners;
- extensive specialized training for first responders and detectives in the response to sexual assault;
- cooperation with the development and institution of an External Review Panel – one of the first of its kind – to review closed sexual assault cases for investigative comprehensiveness and indications of gender bias;
- completion of an audit of the community-wide response to sexual assault – one of the first

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community audits to focus exclusively on sexual assault – including all of the key law enforcement agencies, advocacy organizations and medical service providers serving victims of sexual assault in Missoula County; and

- community advocates and students reporting better communication and coordination with UMPD officers than ever before.

“Our agreement with the University of Montana Police Department following our investigation into the handling of sexual assault complaints made by women in Missoula has been a catalyst for powerful changes in the law enforcement, the university, and the community’s coordinated response to sexual assault,” said Vanita Gupta, the head of the Civil Rights Division. “We are grateful for the efforts of the University of Montana, the UMPD and the entire Missoula community because, as a result of these reforms, the women of Missoula are safer, more trusting of the criminal justice system and subject to more fair and respectful treatment by campus police. The University of Montana and the UMPD had the courage and leadership to acknowledge and address these problems on its campus, and as a result, they are poised to become a model for institutions of higher education and campus police departments grappling with these issues around the country.”

“Today signals a true accomplishment by the University of Montana and its police department,” said U.S. Attorney Michael Cotter of the District of Montana. “They have worked tirelessly toward changes that are substantial, sustainable, and will benefit the community for generations to come. Thanks to this community effort, today the university is safer and is a place where students can learn and thrive.”

The full implementation of the department’s agreement with the UMPD marks the second completion of the four agreements stemming from the department’s multi-pronged investigation, launched in May 2012, regarding the handling of sexual assault complaints made by women in Missoula. The investigation, conducted under the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement act of 1994, the Safe Streets Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, evaluated the response to sexual assault at the University of Montana at Missoula, the UMPD, the Missoula Police Department (MPD) and the Missoula County Attorney’s Office. The department entered into agreements with the university, the UMPD and the MPD in May 2013, to resolve findings related to those parties and address deficiencies in their response to sexual assaults. The department, together with the Montana Attorney General’s Office, entered into an agreement with the Missoula County Attorney’s Office the following year, in June 2014. The implementation of those agreements has already improved these parties’ response to sexual assaults.

These agreements, as well as a description of the Department of Justice’s work regarding sexual assault in Missoula are available at: <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/>. The independent reviewer’s final compliance report, describing in detail his determination that the UMPD has successfully achieved full compliance with the Justice Department agreement, is forthcoming, and will be available on the Justice Department’s website upon its release.

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