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



The Department of Justice announced today that the Missoula, Montana, Police Department (MPD) has fully implemented the requirements of its agreement with the department to improve the MPD'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 criminal justice system and the University of Montana to sexual assault. Thomas R. Tremblay, the independent reviewer who determines whether the terms of the agreement have been met, has determined, and the department has agreed, that the MPD 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 MPD was to better protect and vindicate the rights of sexual assault victims by transforming the MPD's response to allegations of sexual assault. To do this, the agreement required significant changes to the police department'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 MPD's implementation of the agreement has resulted in a host of historic advances in the Missoula response to sexual assault, including the following:

- creation of a new Special Victims' Unit in the MPD focusing on sex crimes cases, and an interview room specifically designed for interviews with victims of sexual assault;
- extensive specialized training for first responders and detectives in the response to sexual assault;
- 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;

- community advocates reporting better communication and coordination with local law enforcement than ever before; and
- victim surveys indicating significant satisfaction with police officers' and detectives' treatment of victims reporting sexual assault to law enforcement.

“Our agreement with the Missoula 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 both the law enforcement and the community’s coordinated response to sexual assault,” said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta of the Civil Rights Division. “We are grateful for the efforts of MPD 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 local law enforcement. Missoula’s police department had the courage and leadership to acknowledge that it had a problem and to address it, and as a result, is poised to become a model for communities struggling with these issues around the country.”

“We commend the Missoula Police Department and the city of Missoula for the leadership and commitment that they have demonstrated to transform the way in which their city police department responds to reports of sexual assault,” said U.S. Attorney Michael Cotter of the District of Montana. “We also recognize and appreciate the hard work that the detectives and officers of the Missoula Police Department have put into carrying out these reforms. In so doing, they have carried out the highest ideals of public service, making the safety and civil rights of their community a top priority, and their efforts should be an inspiration to us all.”

The full implementation of the department’s agreement with the MPD marks the first completion of the series of 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 University of Montana Police Department (UMPD), the 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 agreements regarding 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’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 MPD has successfully implemented the department’s agreement, is forthcoming, and will be available on the department’s website upon its release.

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