

# UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SPECIAL VICTIMS' COUNSEL PROGRAM



The Special Victims' Counsel Program delivers victim-centered advice and advocacy through comprehensive, independent representation to sexual assault victims worldwide, assists them in obtaining support and recovery resources, and promotes greater confidence in the military justice process and the United States Air Force.

SVCs represent victims at every step of the military justice process to enforce their rights; SVCs represent victims at law enforcement interviews, trial and defense counsel interviews, every pre-trial hearing and in trial. SVCs enforce victims' rights to safety, privacy, and right to be treated fairly and respectfully. SVCs engage with base leaders and other decision makers to ensure that a victim's voice and choices are heard.

SVCs are attorneys who form a protected attorney-client relationship with the victim, so that they can talk about every concern privately.



**"During the most stressful, most discouraging, most painful experience of my life, my SVC was there to guide me. My SVC didn't just file papers; he knew the best strategies and always said things in exactly the right way so I could understand. I owe him my sanity."**

SVCs are supported by Special Victims' Paralegals (SVPs). Together, their primary duty is to represent the victim. The SVC/SVP chain of command is independent from every base chain of command. SVCs/SVPs provide a broad range of legal assistance, represent the victim in other related proceedings, such as a separation or parole board and can work with local authorities when a case is not prosecuted by the military.

Which victims can automatically be given an SVC upon request? Victims who are Active Duty, Reserve, Air National Guard members, USAFA or BMT trainees simply have to ask for an SVC; regardless of the accused's duty status. Victims who are dependent spouses or children and retirees can be represented by an SVC, upon request, if the accused can be court-martialed. DoD civilian employees can be represented by an SVC, upon request, if the accused can be court-martialed and there is a connection between the assault and the victim's workplace.

However, any other sexual assault victim can request an SVC by making an "Exceptional Circumstances Request" which will be reviewed by the SVC Division's Chief, Directorate Chief and AFLOA Commander. Circumstances are not exceptional if the assault occurred prior to service or if the accused can not be prosecuted by the military.

**"My SVC fought for me fiercely...She provided me with all of my options (as far as writ writ of mandamus and appeal go), then allowed me to make my own decision about appealing."**



Victims can be represented by an SVC after the court-martial through the post-trial appeal process, clemency and parole hearings.

Who does a victim ask to get an SVC? A victim can always call or visit a Special Victim's Counsel's Office. A victim can ask a military law enforcement officer, a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, any Family Advocate Program members, a chaplain, a prosecutor, or a victim-witness liaison advocate.

To date, victims have been very satisfied with their SVCs. 86% have been extremely satisfied and 100% would recommend having an SVC to other sexual assault victims.



**"Of all the programs that exist with regards to sexual assault in the military, the SVC program is by far the most important one...Without my SVC, I would have felt that I was drowning and powerless to protect my privacy."**