MS. FRASIER: Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman, members of this commission, it's my pleasure to be able to be here with you.

My name is Margo Frasier. I'm presently a professor at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, and I'm the former sheriff of Travis County, Texas, which is Austin, Texas. I'm also a former board of directors member of the National Sheriff's Association and the former president of the Major County Sheriff's Association.

I sit before you as a person who has spent over 30 years of my life in some aspect of corrections having started out in one of the cell blocks that Doug Dretke now supervises and looks over.

Having worked in the county jail system, having been an attorney representing cities and counties in the vast variety of things they can get themselves into, and then having served eight years as sheriff of a county which houses the capitol of
the state of Texas, during my years of experience, I'd like to say that I have seen a great difference in the sort of environment when it comes to the issue of sexual assaults of inmates, but I'm not sure I've seen near the progress that I would have hoped to have seen in over 30 years.

When I began working in the state prison system, people kind of laughed and joked about the inmate families and this sort of thing and, basically, ignored staff sexual misconduct. And I'm not sure that there has been a great deal of change in some ways.

I come to you very aware of the issues that face not only state run institutions or large county jails, but I had a county jail that had a little bit over 3,000 beds, but also aware of the fact that there are county jails in this great state of Texas and in the United States that had, you know, populations in the jail under ten. And these issues and all the sorts of things that we do, we need to be aware of the fact of the very differences of the sizes that we deal with.
I would say to you that when you look at the issue of hiring and training and retention of personnel, I think you have to start with the hiring, retention and training of the leadership because I do think that the leadership is what makes a difference.

The expectation that a leader sets for what is going to be allowed in an institution is not the end. When I as sheriff would say that we were going to have a zero tolerance for any sort of staff sexual misconduct and that we were going to have an atmosphere where inmates felt safe to approach staff and let staff know that they do not feel safe in the institution, it didn't mean that it didn't happen, but it sure made it a heck of a lot more likely to happen than if it hadn't been said.

And so I think that when we talk about any issues of selection and training, we have to talk about the folks at the top setting expectations of what the facility will be like, of setting things like zero tolerance policies. And I'm talking in
terms of the culture, and the culture as a whole.

And one of the things I certainly found when I was sheriff was that not only did we not want to have a situation where sexual assault was by any means seen as appropriate, but the fact that sexual harassment was not appropriate. And that not only meant inmates and staff, but that meant staff to staff, because often that's where the sexually charged atmosphere begins. When you talk about recruiting and hiring, personnel obviously is the key to your ultimate success.

I made a comment in my written remarks to start off the process with the wrong kind of staff is like deciding you're going to go to this hearing in Miami and start off in the direction of California. You might get there, but you are going to waist a lot of resources and time in the process. But one of the things that is faced often by jails in particular, but certainly state institutions, like my next door neighbor, Mr. Dretke talked about state issues, but particularly when you're talking about county
jails, it's the limited pool of applicants that you have to choose from so that you wind up being in a situation instead of getting to choose who you want, it's the idea that you're basically screening out who is the most undesirable for you to hire. And when you look at why that is, I think there are really three main issues. One is the fact that often these facilities are located in remote locations. It's difficult. Although I must say I moved from Austin to Huntsville last year and I love being in the piney woods of east Texas, but I still have friends that shake their head at me and think I must have lost my mind, but, you know, I enjoy it. But it's difficult to get folks to want to relocate to more remote areas.

One of the other issues that's been talked a lot about today is salary, and it certainly often does come into play. I had the fortune, because of the fact that quite frankly I was willing to use some of my political capital to have it achieved, I had the highest pay corrections officers in any county jail in the state of Texas. And it's
certainly higher paid than the state paid, and
quite frankly was on sort of even level with the
Bureau of Prisons. And so I had the ability to not
have salary be an issue and to be able to recruit
people and maintain people.

But, salary is often a problem for a lot of
situations. No matter how so dedicated somebody
may be, it's often situations we see facing a lot
of other public occupations such as teaching.
Particularly at, you know, the secondary and
elementary level is the fact that they may be very
extremely dedicated, but how do you explain to your
child that they can't ever go to camp like the kid
next door because their parent has chosen to be a
public servant.

But I think one of the other aspects that
results in the pool being so limited is the fact
that the job of a corrections officer is often seen
as undesirable. When you look at the movies, they
tend to talk about police officers as being heroes,
but instead you have a situation where corrections
officers are often portrayed as being people who
are, you know, sadistic and are lacking integrity. So the pool itself is difficult.

The next difficult issue is the issue of background and selection. I sat here this morning and listened to some folks talk about the selection process they went through and I thought, boy, it would be amazing if everybody could just do the things that they're able to do.

There are sheriffs in this country and I think there are probably police and directors around this country that will tell you that they are lucky to be able to have a background in investigation that consist of a couple of phone calls and a form letter because of the fact that they simply lack the resources to do anything more thorough.

But one of the serious problems that happens is that often, and I do quite a bit of, you know, consulting with departments that have been sued, and one of the things that I often see is that they hire somebody else's problem, someone who has been literally chased out the door, but they were allowed to go out that door. They resigned instead
of being terminated. The internal investigation that was going on was stopped mid stream so that there is no sort of finding. And in some cases part of the agreement is they'll be given a favorable recommendation, not just a neutral, a favorable recommendation. And so the next person who looks to them, and somebody comes to me, they have experience, they have the proper certification from the state and they have a good recommendation. And in particular for smaller entities, they think that they're getting a great deal, and instead it turns out that they are getting somebody whose integrity is definitely compromised.

I think that we have to look at having some way that we can have this reported and registered in an easy and extensive way for people to be able to find out.

Let me switch quickly because I know we're limited on time to the issue of training. When they went around, the Moss Group went around and some focus groups all around the United States, what they found was two-thirds of the people didn't
have any kind of training on this issue, anything
having to do with sexual assault. And I think the
reality of it is that when your pool is who your
pool is and some of the background issues may be
and who you wind up -- so the question is how do
you take and make those folks the best people you
possibly can make them be.

So, I think training becomes so very important
at all kinds of levels. Recruit training is,
obviously, very important not just on the issues of
acquainting people with the issue on helping them
recognize, but also training on issues of culture
and issues of integrity. But to train somebody in
the recruit academy and never retrain them again I
equate to the fact of if I did talk to my daughter
about drugs and sex when she was nine and now she's
13, and if I think that that nine year-old lesson
still works when she's 13, I would be a fool. And
so you have to keep stressing these issues and
having inservice training, again the same sort of
things.

And what we know also is that it needs to be,
when you're talking about jails, very much jail specific because jails are different than prisons as far as the time that they have people there and some of the issues that they face.

I think that it is time that we start talking about two specific issues and two specific areas of training that we haven't talked a great deal about before, and one of them is the idea of some gender specific training. And one of the things that when I looked at the BJS statistics that came out, one of the things that just, quite frankly, made my stomach turn was the number of female officers that were named at being involved in sexual misconduct.

And I think that we need to not only research and understand what the dynamic is that's going on there, but that we owe it to the inmates and to the officers to give them specific training to help them be able to combat, obviously, what is a very serious problem.

I think the other group that we need to continue to really talk about and look at training is of people who are executives, jail
administrators, sheriffs, chiefs of police, you know. The people that are heads of the state wide systems, obviously, are very aware of the very issues, but there are over 3,000 jails in the United States that are county jails. And if you start talking about the city lock-ups and facilities, you could probably add another 15 to 20,000 facilities, and these people are not being reached.

I commend you for the actions that you have taken thus far and I look forward to continuing to work with you. Thank you.