

Special Victim Counsel

What is the Special Victims' Counsel (SVC) program?

The SVC program enables victims of sexual assault to have an attorney appointed free of charge to advise and represent them at all stages of the military justice process. The Army instituted its SVC program in November 2013 in accordance with DoD guidance instructing each Service to establish a "special victim's advocacy program best suited for that Service."

What type of services does the SVC provide?

An SVC is an attorney who advocates on behalf of the victim to actors in the military justice system, including commanders, convening authorities, Staff Judge Advocates, the accused's defense counsel, and military judges. The SVC is present whenever the victim interviews with investigators, trial counsel, and defense counsel. The SVC also assists the victim in obtaining information relevant to the sexual assault case, such as the status of the investigation. Regardless whether a victim files a restricted or unrestricted report, he or she is entitled to an SVC.

Victims of sexual assault also often have legal needs outside of military justice. The SVC can provide assistance with a wide range of legal issues, from family law to consumer law. Often, the SVC assists the client to obtain reimbursement for items taken from CID for evidentiary purposes (ie. cell phones). Communication between the victim and SVC is confidential and protected by attorney-client privilege.

Who serves as SVC and what are their qualifications?

SVCs are Judge Advocates who are licensed to practice law and serve as a Legal Assistance Attorney with the United States Army. SVC's also complete dedicated training and are certified by the Judge Advocate General.

How can the SVC assist a victim who is concerned about collateral misconduct such as underage drinking?

Collateral misconduct is misconduct committed by the victim that has a direct nexus to the sexual assault. Common examples are underage drinking, adultery, fraternization, and violation of curfew. The SVC can advise the victim of the options available regarding collateral misconduct. While the SVC cannot represent the victim for collateral misconduct, the SVC can provide guidance and refer the victim to a Trial Defense Service attorney. In Japan, victims who need defense counsel are referred to TDS, Hawaii: DSN: 315-456-1207 (1190), COM: 808-656-1207 (1190).

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