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Army sex-crime plan opposed

Legislators: Database could be insecure

By **Lolita C. Baldor**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An Army plan to develop a database of sexual assaults is meeting resistance from an advocacy group and members of Congress, who say it could violate victims' privacy.

In a letter to Army Secretary Francis Harvey, 15 members of Congress said the new system would deter sexual-assault victims from reporting crimes and seeking treatment. They

asked him not to collect personal information or medical records in the database.

The proposal comes in the wake of several sexual-assault scandals in the military.

The Air Force Academy in Colorado is still struggling to recover after complaints that dozens of female cadets were assaulted and then punished when they reported the abuse. And a recent survey by the Veterans Affairs Department showed that six in 10 women who served in the National Guard or Reserves say they were sexually harassed or assaulted.

The database would include information such as the victim's name, Social Security number, date of birth,

military service data, reports from assault investigations, medical records and punishments for offenders.

A 30-day comment period on the plan ended yesterday. No final decision has been made, according to Pentagon spokesman Hank Minitrez.

Minitrez said fewer than 10 people in the Army could have access to information that would identify those in the database. Minitrez said others would have access only to summary reports and information that wouldn't identify those involved.

The National Organization for Women has called on its supporters to send an e-mail to the Army asking that the program be delayed because documenting a "description of the

incident and details of medical and mental health treatment is unconscionable and will bring the reporting of sexual violence and assault in the military to a standstill."

In their letter to Harvey, the lawmakers said they were particularly concerned about an exemption to the program that could allow an assailant with a higher rank or security clearance to have his or her connection to the assault left out of the database.

Instead of introducing the new system, the members of Congress said, the Pentagon should complete a long-overdue database of crime reports that would include a wide variety of information but not include identifying information.