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# NEWSLETTER

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## SYSTEMIC BETRAYAL: HOW THE ARMY'S FAMILY ADVOCACY PROGRAM FAILS VICTIMS





*Kristina Graham was a military spouse. She is not a service member, which makes the story below much more shocking. She spent nearly twenty years helping children and families as a school counselor. Today, she advocates for truth, healing, and hope for those affected by domestic violence and systemic failures. Guided by hope, she trusts in God's goodness and believes that light always finds its way through darkness. The opinions and views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policies, positions, or endorsements of the Walk the Talk Foundation and its members. (Published October 25, 2025)*

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### ***Systemic Betrayal: How the Army's Family Advocacy Program Fails Victims***

Why don't military domestic victims speak up? Seeking help can backfire, with inexperienced systems allowing abusers to shift blame, leaving victims facing disbelief, trauma, and professional consequences. The Army's Family Advocacy Program (FAP) is meant to protect, but my experience and those of others show it can deepen the damage, silencing those who need help most.

Eleven months ago, I reached out to FAP after escalating intimidation, controlling behavior, and emotional distress in my marriage. My support network urged me to call the police, but I turned to FAP, believing they would help. I did not want my husband punished; I wanted him to get help and for me to be safe.

I had previously filed a restricted report, hoping for guidance without escalation. After reporting serious safety concerns, I faced retaliation through false accusations, including fabricated financial claims that FAP accepted without investigation then passed that information on to the IDC (Incident Determination Committee). They misclassified me as the offender without ever meeting with me in person or virtually. A closer look at the IDC reveals significant issues in how determinations are made, including due process flaws highlighted in a 2025 U.S. Army legal review by Erhan Bedestani, such as no counsel or hearings, risking unfair labeling for both accused and victims in its blurred therapeutic-adjudicative process.



During my FAP appeal, my attorney discovered that my spouse's false submissions to FAP had created a misleading impression that contributed to my misclassification. Clarification requests went unanswered. Stress triggered symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), including nightmares, anxiety, and neurological episodes.

I voluntarily took a polygraph showing no deception and gathered character references from friends and former partners describing me as empathetic, reliable, and trustworthy, traits inconsistent with the offender label. Despite this, FAP upheld its decision. One social worker even suggested that my documented vestibular migraines were evidence I was manipulating my spouse because I needed regular sleep. In reality, the migraines worsened under stress and lack of sleep. Instead of helping me feel safe, I was blamed and retraumatized.

I received no meaningful assistance from FAP and was left to seek support elsewhere. Independent victim advocacy centers helped me understand what was happening and present my experience in a way that was less retraumatizing. Research highlights systemic challenges in FAP, a 2020 RAND report found that FAP's coordination with external advocates and access to services vary widely across military installations. As a result, many victims, like me, are forced to rely on civilian resources for safety planning, even when they believed that FAP would care for their families.

The misclassification and offender label had a lasting impact. Instead of focusing on recovery from abuse, I spent months gathering evidence, responding to false claims, and trying to correct the record to save my career. My estranged spouse's attacks, including false submissions to both the court (and FAP), were proven untrue, and an Order of Protection was granted in my favor. My divorce has been delayed by cancellations, refusals to mediate, and withheld financial support.

All but my final FAP appeal was required to be sent back to the same small base that issued the initial offender designation, raising serious concerns about impartiality. I identified 14 distinct FAP policy violations, ranging from procedural failures to inadequate protections. My final appeal is now under review at Army headquarters.



Congressional inquiries and requests to the Army Inspector General were submitted, but neither has oversight of FAP, leaving no recourse other than appeal or federal litigation.

A domestic violence victim grant, ironically provided by the Army even though I remain labeled the offender, funded my safe travel away from home. I also received state victim compensation and support from other advocacy organizations that helped me navigate the aftermath of FAP's misclassification. These external resources enabled me to survive a dangerous situation, create safety plans, and access advocacy services; resources that FAP itself could have provided but did not.

An internet search for "military Family Advocacy Program complaints" shows my experience is far from unique. Many spouses report feeling misclassified, disbelieved, or abandoned. In military spouse forums, it is common to see warnings not to go to FAP at all, with posters cautioning that the program often makes things worse. I have spoken with several people labeled as offenders without justification or evidence, revealing that my story is not an exception but part of a broader, systemic failure. Some victims I have heard about have even taken their own lives after being falsely labeled. After being abused and then watching the system become a weapon used against me, I can understand that despair.

It is no surprise that the Department of Defense's 2003 Task Force on Domestic Violence recommended that FAP focus on advocacy, safety, and support while leaving investigations to law enforcement. In my case, FAP failed to do so. Its focus seemed less on ensuring safety and more on assigning a label and closing the case, regardless of truth. Labels do not heal trauma or protect victims.

Policies mean little if they are not upheld in practice. Safety depends not just on having the right rules but on applying them fairly and consistently with trauma-informed action behind them. When victims do not feel safe reaching out, warning signs go unspoken until it is too late. Behind too many of today's headlines, from domestic violence homicides to veteran suicides and mass shootings, are families who tried to find help but could not find safety in time. With 14,110 abuse cases in FY 2023,



a 2024 GAO (Government Accountability Office) analysis underscores the urgent need for reliable FAP systems.

My experience reflects systemic issues, not individual actions, shared by many military spouses, and if we cannot safely talk about mental health and violence within our own ranks, we are not just silencing victims; we are endangering everyone.



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Feel free to reach out privately at [francescagraham@walkthetalkfoundation.org](mailto:francescagraham@walkthetalkfoundation.org) or in the comments.

**PETITIONS:** [SIGN THIS PETITION](#) demanding that our leaders in Congress change the DoD's unjust administrative investigatory system.

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Graphic: Photo provided by Kristina Graham