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SWAN Newsletter

SWAN Attends the VA Women's Forum, Calls the VA Out on Poor Handling of Sexual Trauma Claims

Staff members from SWAN attended the Veterans Administration Forum on Women's Veterans held at The Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. The

Forum was attended by Secretary Eric

Shinseki and other members of the Veterans Administration (VA), the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).



SWAN's table at the Veterans Administration Forum on Women's Veterans
Anuradha Bhagwati (left), Marlisa Grogan (right)

During Q&A, SWAN Executive Director, Anu Bhagwati, dispelled some myths about the new PTSD claims regulations and asked a pointed question to the panel:

"The VA's new PTSD regulations do NOT help veterans whose source of PTSD is Military Sexual Assault [MST]. The regulations exclusively help veterans whose source of PTSD is combat trauma. It seems to me that the VA's compensation standard is much higher for survivors of MST than for combat veterans." Anu continued, "There also seems to be an enormous disconnect between VBA and VHA, to the detriment of veterans with PTSD and other diagnosed clinical disorders. Why is it that VBA is allowed to disregard the expert diagnoses of VHA's own psychologists and psychiatrists?"

The new PTSD standards recently adopted by the VA still fail to ease the process of gaining compensation for military sexual assault and harassment victims. SWAN continues to demand fair standards for MST survivor claims and that the VA conduct full and sweeping reform of MST benefit claims processing.

SWAN NEEDS YOUR HELP

[Donate Now](#)

SWAN is a 501(c)3 organization that urgently needs your tax-deductible financial support to continue its efforts. Please consider giving in support of our work. Your contribution will go directly to serving the needs of servicewomen and veterans.

MISSION

SWAN supports, defends, and empowers today's servicewomen and women veterans of all eras, through groundbreaking advocacy initiatives and innovative, healing community programs.

VISION

SWAN's vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination,

SWAN's Legal Adviser in the News



Rachel Natelson, SWAN's Legal Adviser, was recently published in The Huffington Post. "*Separate, Unequal, and Unrecognized*", is an article on the need for the VA to revise the proof standards for MST survivor PTSD benefit claims.

"While the new PTSD rules recognize that women in uniform are increasingly likely to experience deployment-related

stressors, they fail to respond to the single strongest predictor of PTSD for this population: military sexual trauma. The data supporting this causal link is sobering; studies not only reveal sexual assault to be a stronger predictor of PTSD for women veterans than combat history, but also suggest that sexual harassment causes the same rates of PTSD in women as combat does in men."

Read Rachel's complete article here:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rachel-natelson/separate-unequal-and-unre_b_670302.html

Staff Profile:

Brittany Stalsburg, Executive Assistant

Brittany is a political science PhD student at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where she primarily studies women and politics.

Brittany has worked on a variety of projects for numerous research institutions and think tanks, including: the



Center for American Women and Politics, Demos, and the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Here at SWAN, Brittany manages the day-to-day around the office, provides support to the Executive Director and fields all media requests. In addition, Brittany does a great deal of policy research and has authored SWAN's Fact Sheets and Quick Fact sheets.

"Working for SWAN has opened my eyes to the many injustices inflicted upon the brave women who serve our country. These injustices are too often invisible, ignored, and unvoiced. I am

intimidation or assault. SWAN also seeks to reform veterans' services on a national scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families.

SWAN affects change for servicewomen and women veterans by educating and informing policy makers, the media and the public, engaging military leadership and veterans providers, developing healing and empowering community programs, offering personal support and guidance from fellow women veterans and providing pro bono legal referrals from military law experts.

proud to work for an organization that exposes the violence, discrimination, and unfair treatment of military women. I am confident that SWAN's work will transform the military institution so that equality is ensured."

SWAN is Hiring!

SWAN has an immediate opening for an Executive Assistant to work directly for the Executive Director in SWAN's New York City headquarters. If you are interested, please follow the link to the job posting here: <http://www.idealists.org/ifa/en/av/Job/392521-177>

Writing Workshops Kick Off

SWAN is collaborating with the New York Writers Coalition to present a series of free writing workshops for women veterans. No previous writing experience is required, and participants are introduced to a variety of writing styles and taught the skills needed to write about their own individual experiences as service women and women veterans.

"The power of this workshop is in helping people to tell their own story in their own words," said Kalima DeSuze, Community Development Director for SWAN. "There is something liberating, transformational and therapeutic in having the authority and agency to speak about your own life in your own voice."

Two four-week sessions are being held on Wednesday evenings from 6-8pm on August 4 - 25 and September 1 - 22. The workshops will also give the new writers the opportunity to share their work in a SWAN-sponsored public event. Sign up by calling Kalima at 212-683-0015 x 324 or email kalima@servicewomen.org.

Upcoming Veterans Day Swim - Support SWAN and Wounded Warrior Project



Mark it on your calendars. SWAN has partnered with the New York swim club CIBBOWS to sponsor an open water swim at Coney Island on November 6th as part of Veterans Day celebrations.

The CIBBOWS Veterans Day Charity Open Water 5K Swim will benefit two celebrated organizations that serve veterans - the Service Women's

Action Network and the Wounded Warrior Project. Participants have the choice of swimming 1 mile, 2 miles, or the full 5K. The race is a 2.5 K straight mile course running parallel to the shore, with turn arounds at majestic Coney Island Pier and at the end of Brighton Beach.

In the interest of safety, swimmers have the innovative option of switching distances mid-race if they feel that the cold is too much for them.

Swimmers are expected to gather donations from supporters/sponsors prior to the race. There is a limit of 100 swimmers, so please sign up early. To register go to the CIBBOWS website and look for the Veterans Day 5k Race. <http://www.cibbows.org/races>

End of Summer BBQ

SWAN will be hosting an End of Summer cookout at The Carver Community Garden in East Harlem on September 18. Food will be prepared using the bountiful harvest from SWAN's Community Garden



program. Save the date and make sure you stay tuned to upcoming SWANALERTS for more information on this fantastic event.

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