



Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)
123 William Street, 16th floor
New York, NY 10038
www.claimingjustice.org
646-602-5621 (work)
212-533-4598 (fax)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 24, 2009

Contact: Julianne H. Sohn
Phone: (310) 883-8956, E-mail: jules@servicewomen.org

Service Women's Action Network helps kick off the Human Rights Campaign, Servicemembers United National Tour to Repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in Philadelphia

U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy, alongside gay, lesbian, and straight service members, highlight "Voices of Honor: A Generation Under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'"

PHILADELPHIA – The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) is joining forces with the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Servicemembers United (SU) on the Voices of Honor Tour in an effort to highlight the discriminatory law that damages military readiness and national security.

SWAN, an organization dedicated to serving military women and veterans (www.servicewomen.org) ; HRC, the nation's largest gay rights organization; SU, the nation's largest gay troops, veterans and straight allies group; and U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy (D-PA), will visit Philadelphia, Penn., on July 27 as a part of "Voices of Honor: A Generation Under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'"

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell is the only law that allows a segment of the federal government to actively discriminate against gays and lesbians," said Anuradha Bhagwati, SWAN Executive Director and a former Marine captain, who is speaking in Philadelphia alongside other veterans and Congressman Murphy.

The Philadelphia visit includes a press conference Monday morning and a public town hall meeting in the evening. To learn more, visit: www.hrc.org/VoicesOfHonor.

According to a study released by Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), in 1996 and 1997, women were disproportionately impacted by Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT). Women made up nearly 50 percent of the DADT discharges in 2007 despite women making up approximately 15 percent of the armed forces.

"This policy is unjust and must be repealed," Bhagwati said. "While I served on active-duty, I saw the toll of Don't Ask, Don't Tell on my friend. She was an exemplary Marine officer. In fact,

SWAN – Service Women's Action Network

she wanted to continue serving our country, but the stress of living under the policy forced her to leave. Is this what we as a nation want? Do we want to continue to discharge or have qualified, dedicated and capable servicemembers not re-enlist in the military because of a discriminatory policy?"

Rep. Murphy, an Iraq War veteran and a former paratrooper in the U.S. Army's elite 82nd Airborne Division, recently became the lead sponsor of the bill to repeal the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' law, the Military Readiness Enhancement Act (H.R. 1283).

Passed in 1993, the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' law allowed gay, lesbian, and bisexual service personnel to serve in the armed forces as long as their sexual orientation was not publicly disclosed or discovered. As of 2008, more than 13,000 men and women have been discharged from the military because of their sexual orientation, including more than 60 Arabic linguists and nearly 800 other service members in critical occupational fields.

PRESS CONFERENCE DETAILS:

WHAT: Press conference highlighting "Voices of Honor: A Generation Under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'"

WHEN: July 27, 2009 at 11:00 a.m. EST

WHERE: People's Plaza in front of Independence Hall; 5th and Market, Philadelphia, PA

WHO: Press conference to feature remarks from:

-- U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy, Iraq veteran and lead sponsor of the bill to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (HR 1283);

-- Jarrod Chlapowski, a former U.S. Army Korean linguist who opted to not re-enlist because of DADT and is a public policy advocate at the Human Rights Campaign;

-- Alex Nicholson, a former U.S. Army Human Intelligence Collector discharged under DADT and current executive director of Servicemembers United;

-- Anuradha Bhagwati, a former Marine officer and executive director of Service Women's Action Network

-- Stephen Vossler, a former Korean linguist who served with numerous gay service members such as Chlapowski;

-- Joe Soto, a Philadelphia native who is a former Marine and Naval Academy graduate, as well as an active member of USNA Out;

TOWN HALL DETAILS

WHAT: Public town hall discussion on the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

WHEN: July 27, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. EST

WHERE: WHY? Studio Building; 150 N. 6th St., Philadelphia, PA

WHO: Town hall to feature remarks from Jarrod Chlapowski, Alex Nicholson, Anuradha Bhagwati, Stephen Vossler and Joe Soto

For veteran profiles, visit: http://www.hrc.org/sites/voicesofhonor/about_vets.asp