



NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 17, 2011
CONTACT: KATY OTTO, katy@servicewomen.org or 240.478.9387 (cell)

Service Women's Action Network Hails the STOP Act to Combat Sexual Assault in the Military

Congresswoman Jackie Speier Introduces "Groundbreaking" Bill HR 3435

Washington, DC – The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) commends the introduction of Congresswoman Jackie Speier's (D-San Francisco/San Mateo) legislation to combat the issue of conflict of interest in sexual assault investigations in the military. The bill was introduced last night and already has 44 co-sponsors.

SWAN representatives traveled to Washington, DC to the National Press Club today for Speier's announcement of the legislation. SWAN has worked closely with Congresswoman Speier in drafting the bill to ensure the needs of sexual assault survivors are adequately addressed by creating an independent oversight office to oversee and investigate allegations of sexual assault (click [here](#) to read the full bill summary and [here](#) to read SWAN's factsheet on sexual violence in the military).

“This groundbreaking legislation presents a positive solution to what has become a crisis of command within the military,” said Greg Jacob, Policy Director for SWAN. “The STOP Act is based on the judicial reforms already undertaken years ago by our Allies in the UK, Canada and Australia. By appointing a Director of Military Prosecutions, the bill addresses the inherent conflicts of interest in the immediate chain of command prosecuting their subordinates, and takes the onerous burden of determining case dispositions off the desk of commanders who can then focus 100% on accomplishing their unit's mission. The STOP Act also provides oversight of military court decisions to ensure that the punishments given fit the crime. Recently an Army commander was convicted of 14 counts of sexual harassment and assault. He was sentenced by a military judge to only 90 days in jail. Had The STOP Act been law, such an injustice would not have occurred.”

Known as the **Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention Act – or STOP Act** – the bill will take the reporting, oversight, investigation, and victim care of sexual assaults out of the hands of the perpetrator’s chain of command and place jurisdiction in a newly created, autonomous Sexual Assault Oversight and Response Office comprised of civilian and military experts.

Rep. Speier has been a vocal advocate for military reform the past several months, sharing the personal stories of 12 men and women who experienced sexual assault while serving in the military in series of speeches given to Congress. (See the most recent video [here](#)).

To date, the military has lacked independent adjudication for cases of sexual violence, and as a result, sexual assault has gone underreported. A 2010 Department of Defense (DoD) survey of active duty members revealed that only a small percentage of the more than 19,000 incidents of rapes and sexual assaults involving service members were actually reported. Of the 3,158 assaults that were reported in 2010, only 529 cases were prosecuted.

Additionally, service members have extremely limited access to civilian courts to seek justice. Because cases are addressed through service members’ chain of command, many victims do not report for fear of impact on their careers or a lack of faith that they will be treated fairly and that their perpetrators will be properly prosecuted.

Founded by women veterans in 2007, SWAN has advocated for women and men who have experienced rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military through policy, legislation, public education and community programs.

Speier’s office is also announcing the launch of a website, [Protecting Our Defenders](#), which will serve as a grassroots platform where stories of the injustices experienced by assault victims can be shared with military leaders and Congress. The site’s goal is to keep sexual violence in the military at the forefront of the public’s attention to help bring an end to this epidemic.

Speier’s dedication to this work is clear and laudable. “I want to remind the survivors of sexual assault in the military that the pursuit of justice never ends,” says Rep. Speier on release of the legislation. “Thank you for your service to our country and thank you for helping put an end to this silent epidemic! You will be heard! “

SWAN is a national human rights organization founded and led by women veterans. SWAN’s vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, 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. You can follow Service Women’s Action Network on Twitter at

<http://twitter.com/servicewomen>, or on Facebook at

<http://www.facebook.com/servicewomen>.

###