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Service Women's Action Network

June 24, 2011



Dear Friends of SWAN,

As the President draws down troop levels in Afghanistan, it is critical that we maintain pressure on our policymakers to ensure the safety and rights of our servicemembers and veterans. Whether or not our nation is at war, women and men in the armed forces will face the same threat from sexual predators in the ranks, until the military takes the necessary steps to reform: 1. Victims' rights and protections; 2. Commander accountability; and 3. The prosecution and court-martial systems.

This week, the Senate confirmed the appointment of Leon Panetta as our nation's Secretary of Defense. Secretary Panetta has a huge opportunity as the new head of the Pentagon to transform the military and preserve the welfare of those who have sworn to defend our nation. Unlike his predecessors, Secretaries Gates and Rumsfeld, [who are still facing litigation for failing to prevent and prosecute military rapes during their careers](#),



Leon Panetta

Secretary Panetta can seize the opportunity to chart a bold new path for the Department of Defense on this issue.

Secretary Panetta faces a dire situation. The Department of Defense estimates 19,000 sexual assaults occurred just last year. 86.5% of military sexual assault survivors do not report the crime, because of intimidation, fear of further abuse or death, and lack of confidence in the investigative and military legal systems. Of the 3,158 reports that were officially made last year, only 529 cases were preferred for courts-martial, and of these, only 53% were convicted.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report yesterday outlining the failures of the Department of Defense Inspector General's office to properly

Read the full text of and related articles about the military rape lawsuit against Sec's Gates and Rumsfeld [here](#).

Read SWAN's press release on the recent GAO report [here](#).

investigate sexual assaults. Please see [SWAN's press release](#) to read more about the report.

Oversight by an independent body is absolutely necessary to ensure that justice is served. Right now, justice is barely even an option, with military law allowing inexperienced junior commanders the discretion to determine whether or not alleged perpetrators in their own units should face a court-martial.

SWAN has been working closely with policymakers to revise age-old policies, regulations and statutes on sexual assault and to establish the oversight that is so sorely lacking in sexual assault investigations and prosecutions. We are grateful for the tireless work of Rep Bruce Braley, who has introduced the most comprehensive sexual assault legislation we have seen yet, in [H.R. 1517, The Holley Lynn James Act](#). This bill includes provisions that would engage the DOD Inspector General in its oversight duties for both sexual assault and domestic violence. H.R. 1517 would also allow sexual assault, sexual harassment and domestic violence survivors who have been victims of commander or institutional negligence the right to sue for damages in Federal court.



Representative Bruce Braley

Read the full text of H.R. 1517 [here](#) and follow the bill through the House of Representatives [here](#).

We have a lot of work to do this year to ensure that this bill passes. Please stay tuned for regular updates on our work to end military sexual assault by following SWAN on Facebook and Twitter and reading our daily blogs!

With best wishes for a safe and happy weekend,

Anu Bhagwati
Executive Director
Service Women's Action Network

Donate Now

Donate Now

SWAN is a 501(c)3 organization that urgently needs your financial support. Your tax deductible donation will help SWAN ensure equality, fairness, and justice for women in the military and dramatically improve resources for women veterans.



About Us

SWAN is a 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 find the Service Women's Action Network on our [homepage](#), on [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#).

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