

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, May 26th 2011
CONTACT: Robb Friedlander: [913/636-0099](tel:9136360099) (cell)
or Robb@lunamediagroup.com

House Passes Defense Authorization Act, Includes Essential Provisions To Help Prevent And Eliminate Military Sexual Assault

Anu Bhagwati, SWAN Executive Director and former Marine Corps Captain, Calls Bill an "Historic Step" Towards Protection of Sexual Assault Survivors

New York, NY – Today, Service Women’s Action Network praised the U.S. House of Representatives’ passage of H.R. 1540, the *National Defense Authorization Act*, a bill which funds the U.S. military for 2012. If signed into law, the bill would provide unprecedented protections of survivors of military rape and sexual assault. Anu Bhagwati, a former Marine Corps Captain and executive director of the Service Women’s Action Network – a national human rights organization founded and led by women veterans – called the bill’s passage a “historic step” towards preventing and eliminating sexual assault in the military.

“Today’s historic vote is yet another positive step forward in the prevention and elimination of what continues to be a crisis in the military,” said Bhagwati. “Last year the Department of Defense estimates that over 19,000 sexual assaults occurred in the ranks. That is a staggering 52 assaults a day that are happening to both men and women serving overseas and at bases here at home.”

The provisions in the NDAA include measures that would ensure confidentiality between victims and victim advocates, access to appropriate legal services for victims, and expedited consideration for transfers by victims under humanitarian guidelines. The bill would also replace the current head of the DOD’s sexual assault response department with a General officer.

“Being assaulted is terrible no matter what the circumstance,” Bhagwati said. “But being in uniform makes it especially difficult for survivors. In the military you cannot quit your job, so you are forced to work with and deploy overseas with your assailant. You cannot move to another town, so you are forced to live in the same community as your assailant – eat near him, shop near him, see him at the gym. This forced co-location causes the victim to be traumatized again and again. These legislative provisions would prevent this from happening.”

The FY 2012 Defense Authorization Bill will now move on to the Senate where last year the sexual assault provisions that passed the House were stripped from the bill prior to the vote. Through the entire legislative process, SWAN will continue advocating to lawmakers regarding the need for these crucial provisions to remain part of the National Defense Authorization Act. To read SWAN’s fact sheet on military rape, sexual assault

and sexual harassment, go to <http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/R-SASH-Quick-Facts.pdf>

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>.

###