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Service Women's Action Network

July 15, 2011



Dear Friends of SWAN,

I'm heading to DC today with our dedicated National Peer Support Helpline caseworker, Rebekah Havrilla, to meet with policymakers and senior members of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) about the issue of Military Sexual Trauma claims reform. I am especially looking forward to meeting with Representative Chellie Pingree, whose landmark bill, H.R. 930, will revise an unfair claims policy that currently discriminates against Military Sexual Trauma survivors. It is critical that this legislation get approved.



Last year, SWAN and the ACLU sued the VA and the Department of Defense for documentation related to military rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and domestic violence. While not all documentation has come in, and we have yet to release our full findings, our initial reports suggest that the Veterans Benefits Administration has a strong bias against veterans whose claims are associated with "Military Sexual Trauma," a euphemism for the psychological trauma associated with military rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

We intend to make clear that under no circumstances is it okay for the VA to build a two-tiered system, one for mental health patients whose suffering is related to combat trauma, and another for those whose suffering is related to military sexual violence. Under no circumstances is it okay for our policymakers to stand idly by while the federal government routinely denies survivors of military rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment the

benefits owed to them by federal law.

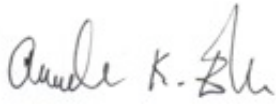
We will not rest until the federal government fixes this gross disparity and gives all wounded warriors the benefits they deserve.

We look forward to reporting back on all of these meetings next week.

Thank you for your incredible support,

Read Representative Chellie Pingree's bill H.R. 930 and follow SWAN's legislative work [here](#).

Read about VA Undersecretary Allison Hickey's [memo](#) that SWAN Executive Director Anu Bhagwati says "encourages a change in attitude and process ... but does not change policy."



Anu Bhagwati  
Executive Director, Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)

## 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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