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## **Service Women's Action Network Declares Support of Bill to Require Comprehensive Reporting and Tracking of Sexual Assault Incidents at VA Medical Facilities**

*National Organization Submits Statement Approving H.R. 2074,  
"Veterans Sexual Assault Prevention Act," to House Committee  
on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health*

New York, NY – Today, Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), a national organization that supports, defends, and empowers today's servicewomen and women veterans of all eras, announced its support for a bill requiring a comprehensive policy on reporting and tracking sexual assault incidents that occur at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities.

SWAN has submitted a statement of support for H.R. 2074, the "Veterans Sexual Assault Prevention Act," a bill sponsored by Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle (R-NY). The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs referred H.R. 2074 to the Subcommittee on Health on June 24, 2011, which met today at 4 p.m. to conduct a legislative hearing on the bill, taking SWAN's declaration of support as an official statement in the hearing record.

The organization's statement affirms their hopes that the bill will be the first step in developing a thorough system to keep VA medical facilities safe by ensuring an effective reporting system, particularly given the rampant levels of sexual assault and sexual harassment within the active duty military.

"Safety and care for VA patients should not start or stop at the front door," states SWAN's Policy Director Greg Jacob in the document. "The Department of Defense estimates that in 2010 alone, there were over 19,000 sexual assaults in the military, or 52 sexual assaults per day. It is negligent and dangerous to think that somehow those tens of thousands of survivors and perpetrators simply go away after being discharged."

SWAN urges Congress to pass the bill and require every VA facility to reform its systems in the following ways: 1) develop a well publicized process to handle sexual harassment and sexual

assault complaints, 2) have policies that enforce rules and discipline offenders, 3) train every member of their staff annually on sexual harassment and sexual assault response, 4) maintain a security presence that is attentive and effective, and 5) invest in an infrastructure that allows for a completely safe visit for all veterans.

“VA serves tens of thousands of high-risk veterans every year, and as an institution it must accept responsibility for the care and safety of all its patients from the time they walk onto the grounds of a VA facility until they walk off,” states Jacob. “If the VA fails to do this, veterans desperately in need of care will avoid seeking it out, which will result in untold suffering, chronic mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness and in some cases suicide or death.”

For a full transcript of SWAN’s statement of support for H.R. 2074, click here:  
<http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/health-legislative-hearing-pending-legislation#>.

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>.

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