



PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

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DoD: Do the Right Thing, Stop Military Sexual Assault Now

(Washington, D.C.)— “The tragic death of Vanessa Guillen by a fellow soldier within her ranks is inexcusable,” said Kate O’Hare Palmer on behalf of VVA’s Women Veterans Committee. “In the instances of Military Sexual Assault, the military chain of command has proven, yet again, it is incapable of policing itself. It is unable to prevent sexual harassment and assault, and it is incapable of providing justice for the victims of these crimes. The whole system is complicit with this failure.”

Pfc. Vanessa Guillen, who went missing on April 22, 2020, from 3rd Cavalry Regiment, Ft. Hood, Texas, was identified from remains found June 30, 2020. Guillen had shared with her family that she was experiencing sexual harassment by a senior ranking person, and that, lacking trust and fearful of reprisal, she was too afraid to report it to her command. Frustrated by the Army’s inaction after her disappearance, Guillen’s family launched a social media campaign to demand answers about their daughter’s death.

“We expect these young service members to lay down their lives for our country, yet we cannot protect them within their own ranks. The sexual-assault prevention training is not meeting their needs. It is clear that our recommendations to create better reporting programs and justice for Sexual Assault Survivors have not been implemented,” noted O’Hare Palmer.

The “FY2019 Report on Sexual Assault in the Military”—which cost U.S. taxpayers \$2,367,000— showed 20,500 Sexual assaults in FY2019, up from 14,900 in 2016. While the FY2019 report focused on the military service academies rather than active-duty service personnel, its findings reveal that “official reports” of sexual assault have increased three percent over the previous year, while at the same time, the number of cases sent forward by

Commanders to trial has decreased.

Past DoD reports on sexual assault showed a lack of reporting out of fear of retaliation and shunning by fellow service members; that chain of command involved in these cases remains a conflict; and service members have little faith in the military justice system.

“We applaud the actions of Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel, and Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA), chair of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, who are calling on the DoD Acting Inspector General to conduct a full investigation re Guillen’s work environment, her disappearance, and the actions that the Army took in response,” said O’Hare-Palmer.

Kate O’Hare-Palmer is Chair of the Vietnam Veterans of America Women Veterans Committee. VVA has been fighting for women service members since our founding in 1983.