



PRESS RELEASE

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VVA Deeply Disappointed by Findings of DOD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office Annual Report

(Washington, D.C.) – “Vietnam Veterans of America is deeply disappointed with the findings released on Thursday by the Department of Defense’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) in their annual report, which found a dramatic 13 percent increase across the services in reported cases of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) in 2021,” said Jack McManus, VVA National President. “Overall, 8.4 percent of female servicemembers and 1.5 percent of male servicemembers experienced unwanted sexual contact, according to the report, the worst year for women since 2006, and the second worse year for men.”

“It is devastating to contemplate that these numbers mean over 35,000 servicemembers’ lives and careers were irrevocably changed by these crimes. This disturbing climate in our military is unacceptable and has existed for far too long,” McManus added. “We have read reports like this for years. This is not new information.”

McManus stated, “The tragedy is that the numbers indicate a worsening problem despite recent efforts under the leadership of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to implement policy changes on how the military handles sexual assault. The current climate detailed in the report is one in which sexual assault rates are up and trust in the military when it comes to protecting victims is at an all-time low.”

“This is simply unacceptable. Vietnam Veterans of America has long been at the forefront of the fight for justice for the women and men of our armed forces who have suffered incidents of sexual assault, trauma, and harassment,” said Kate O’Hare Palmer, Chair of the VVA Women Veterans Committee. “We have zealously advocated for veterans struggling with PTSD, homelessness, substance abuse, suicide, and other mental and physical health problems stemming from their MST for nearly half a century.”

Close to ten years after first being introduced by Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) in 2013, the *Military Justice Improvement & Increasing Prevention Act* (S.1520) has been repeatedly thwarted on Capitol Hill and is currently languishing in committee. “No consequence and no accountability have led to appalling increases of these crimes whose victims are our brothers, sisters, relatives, and friends,” McManus said.

“VVA is fully invested in ensuring our nation’s veterans who have been impacted by MST are taken care of. Our nation’s veterans and active-duty servicemen and servicewomen have waited too long for change,” said McManus.

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the nation’s only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA’s founding principle is “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”