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Contact: Indra Lusero, Assistant Director, 303-902-9402, indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu

LAWMAKERS DISPUTE PENTAGON DOCUMENT CALLING GAYS MENTALLY ILL

SANTA BARBARA, CA, June 20, 2006 – Several members of Congress have sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asking him to review a recently discovered Pentagon Instruction classifying homosexuality as a mental disorder, along with mental retardation, impulse control disorders and personality disorders. The document, which was found by researchers at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM), a think tank at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is a Department of Defense Instruction that was signed by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in 1996 and re-certified as "current" in 2003.

The letter, which was signed by nine members of the House Armed Services Committee led by Representative Marty Meehan of Massachusetts, asks the Defense Department to update the classification. The letter notes that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses over thirty years ago, and affirmed that homosexuality "implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities." Last week, the APA, which authors the DSM-IV-TR, the definitive volume on mental health classification, wrote its own letter to the Pentagon urging it to remove homosexuality from the Instruction and update it to reflect the current consensus of medical professionals. The letter states that the de-classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder is "a position shared by all other major health and mental health organizations based on their own review of the science." The American Psychological Association followed suit with a similar letter.

Edwin Dorn, the former Under Secretary of Defense who signed the original Instruction, agreed the document might be out of date. "It is certainly time to revisit the issue of whether homosexuality should be considered a mental disorder," he said this week.

Also today, CSSMM, the research center that located the misclassification, issued a Report Card evaluating the military's treatment of its gay and lesbian service members. The military earned 'F's' in four out of five categories, including "Mental Health Classification," "Anti-gay Harassment and Command Climate," "Evidence-Based Assessment of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'" and "Family Support," and it scored a 'D' in "Suicide Prevention."



The Report Card is accompanied by fact sheets for each category in which the military was graded, along with citations from a broad range of social scientific data. It notes that the combination of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and a near total inattention to its impact on gay and lesbian troops has produced a "leadership vacuum that has created uncertainty, insecurity and permissiveness" around treatment of gay service members. Research shows that many commanders have witnessed and even perpetrated anti-gay harassment, while facing virtually no accountability. Because gay troops cannot reveal the identities of their partners or spouses, their families are largely cut off from support service designed to ensure that troops are ready for deployment. The military, according to the Report Card, has repeatedly ignored evidence showing that open gays do not undermine cohesion or performance.

Dr. Steven Samuels, a social psychologist and professor of leadership who has worked extensively with the military, said it was clear that the misclassification was not scientifically derived and suggested it might be socially or politically motivated. "The very few psychologists who have used this type of abnormal pseudo-classification tend to be motivated by dogma rather than scientific data," he said. "To classify homosexuality with mental retardation, impulse control, and substance abuse, shows at best an ignorance of basic psychology and at worst a purposeful intolerance and discriminatory practice that is incompatible with the high values of the military."

Dr. Aaron Belkin, director of CSSMM, expressed grave concern that the military continues to list homosexuality as a mental illness. "It's unclear why a DoD document would classify homosexuality as a mental disorder over thirty years after the psychiatric community acknowledged this is a mistake," said Dr. Belkin. He described new research showing that military psychologists and chaplains lack the training needed to monitor and treat the mental health of gay and lesbian soldiers. These professionals "may be hampered by confusing and conflicting [DoD] recommendations" in treating the mental health needs of gays and lesbians," according to research recently published in the journal, *Professional Psychology*, which also noted that some military chaplains practice "reparative therapy" on gay troops. "This is exactly what you'd expect would happen when an institution is so out of touch with evidence about mental health," Dr. Belkin said. "This misclassification reflects an orientation of neglect regarding gays in the military that's hurting our troops and our straining our mission."

The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Center for American Progress, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces. More information is available at www.gaymilitary.ucsb.edu.