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PALM CENTER RELEASES STUDY ON GENDER IDENTITY IN U.S. MILITARY New Research Finds Military Unwelcoming to Transsexuals

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, May 31 2007- The Michael D. Palm Center today released a report on the service of gender-nonconforming personnel in the military. The study, entitled, "Gender Identity and the Military - Transgender, Transsexual, and Intersex-identified Individuals in the U.S. Armed Forces," was written by Tarynn M. Witten, Executive Director and Senior Fellow at the TranScience Research Institute in Richmond, Virginia. It was commissioned by the Palm Center, a think tank at the University of California, Santa Barbara, that studies sexual minorities and social policy.

The new study reviews earlier research concluding that transsexuals can be a risk to military effectiveness, in part because their transformations entail higher-than-average anxiety and depression. Currently, U.S. military regulations regard non-traditional gender identities as medical or personality disorders which constitute a basis for separation. The Army Medical Services Standards of Medical Fitness, for instance, cites "transsexualism, exhibitionism, transvestitism, voyeurism, and other paraphilias" as "causes for rejection for appointment, enlistment, and induction." Those who transition during their enlistment are subject to discharge under enlistment violations, as well as through rules relating to homosexuality, cross-dressing or medical or psychological unsuitability. Some countries, including Canada, Israel and Spain do not bar transsexuals, though most Western nations do ban such individuals, while other nations do not even recognize the existence of transsexuals or intersexed individuals in civilian society.

According to the study, the military operates under an assumption that producing combat-ready soldiers requires enforcing a binary understanding of the male and female body, which does not allow room for those who identify as non-traditionally gendered. The military's understanding and treatment of sexual minorities limits its capacity and willingness to work effectively with transgender, transsexual, or intersex-identified individuals. But the study also argues that the rigidity of sexual difference, gender roles, and sexuality are "becoming increasingly less absolute," which raises questions about the admission, retention, training, housing and other services of transgender, transsexual, and intersex-identified individuals in the military.



"This research is essential if our armed forces are to use every qualified individual who is willing and able to serve," said Dr. Aaron Belkin, Director of the Palm Center and a professor of political science at University of California, Santa Barbara. "The lives and capacities of nontraditionally-gendered individuals remain shrouded in stereotypes, and Witten's fresh research is a critical antidote to ignorance and misinformation."

The Michael D. Palm Center, formerly the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, is a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center uses rigorous social science to inform public discussions of controversial social issues, enabling policy outcomes to be informed more by evidence than by emotion. Its data-driven approach is premised on the notion that the public makes wise choices on social issues when high-quality information is available. For more information, visit www.palmcenter.org.