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REVISED MILITARY DOCUMENT SUGGESTS THAT HOMOSEXUALITY IS A DEFECT: Lawmaker, Experts Protest Pentagon Re-Classification

SANTA BARBARA, CA, November 17, 2006 - Congressman Marty Meehan and the American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association sent letters to the Defense Department this week protesting a recently-revised military instruction which now suggests that homosexuality is a defect. Meehan (D-MA) is a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the APA's are professional associations whose members, combined, include more than 185,000 mental health professionals.

In June 2006, Meehan and a group of lawmakers joined the APA's in asking the Defense Department to revise a then-current instruction which classified homosexuality as a mental illness. The Pentagon re-issued the instruction on July 10, 2006. The revised instruction no longer says that being gay is a mental illness. Instead, it includes homosexuality in a list of "conditions, circumstances and defects" alongside bedwetting, alcoholism, personality disorders, mental retardation, and repeated venereal disease infections.

In this week's letter, the American Psychological Association asked the Pentagon to revise the instruction again so as to "eliminate the continued stigmatization of homosexuality as a defect." Meehan said that, "it is my strong belief that homosexuality is in no way a defect and that there is no scientific reason to include it in such a list." And the American Psychiatric Association, which declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, noted that, "homosexuality is not a defect...but could be construed as one by its inclusion in this section."

Some military observers suggested that the regulatory revision looks like an effort by the Pentagon to stigmatize gays, since the modification adds the word, "defects" to what had previously been classified as "conditions." Dr. Aaron Belkin, Director of the Michael D. Palm Center, a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara, said he was surprised by the move. "It is inconsistent with scientific evidence to suggest that homosexuality is a defect," he said. "That the Pentagon would classify homosexuality this way in 2006 may raise questions about its motives or understanding of gay and lesbian service members."