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PALM CENTER STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF SPECIALIST CIARA DURKIN

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SANTA BARBARA, CA - Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, a research institute at the University of California, issued a statement following reports of the death of National Guard Specialist Ciara Durkin, a lesbian service member from Massachusetts who was found dead in Afghanistan two weeks ago.

"While the facts in this case await investigation, we are concerned about the ways in which the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy could obstruct military investigators' ability to obtain a full account of the circumstances of a gay or lesbian service member's death. Any of Durkin's friends or colleagues who are gay or lesbian, and who might possess relevant information, could hesitate to step forward out of fear that they, themselves, or their peers could be investigated under the current policy."

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The 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.