FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 27, 2013

CONTACT: Lauren Gray, Communications Director (215) 983-3099, lauren@servicewomen.org

SERVICE WOMEN’S ACTION NETWORK AND VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
FILE JOINT PETITION TO REFORM DISABILITY CLAIMS PROCESS
FOR MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA SURVIVORS

(NEW YORK, NY) – Today, Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) and Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) jointly petitioned the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to revise VA’s disability claim review process for veterans suffering from PTSD related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) caused by military rape, harassment and/or assault.

Currently, MST survivors face a greater procedural burden and are denied benefits at a significantly higher rate than other PTSD claimants.

“Requiring Military Sexual Trauma survivors to go to greater lengths to demonstrate PTSD and denying their applications at significantly higher rates is not only unjust—it gives the wrong message. It says the military believes MST survivors are less credible than other PTSD claimants, an attitude contributing to the current military sexual assault crisis,” said Anu Bhagwati, SWAN Executive Director and former Marine Corps captain.

“The playing field needs to be leveled with assured equitability for the men and women who endure these humiliating, degrading, and violent acts while serving their country. As veterans, they deserve nothing less,” said John Rowan, National President, Vietnam Veterans of America.

Service Women’s Action Network and Vietnam Veterans of America filed their rule-making petition pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. § 553(e).

“Federal law requires VA to provide a timely and reasoned response,” says Professor Michael Wishnie, co-director of the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School, which represents SWAN and VVA in this petition. “Any refusal by VA to initiate the requested procedure is subject to review in U.S. District Court.”

SWAN is a national nonpartisan civil rights organization founded and led by women veterans. SWAN’s mission is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without discrimination, harassment or assault; and to reform veterans’ services to ensure high quality health care and benefits for women veterans and their families. You can follow Service Women’s Action Network on Twitter at http://twitter.com/servicewomen, or on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/servicewomen.

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.” For more information on Vietnam Veterans of America, go to www.vva.org. Facebook https://www.facebook.com/pages/Vietnam-Veterans-of-America/122123037828089?ref=ts or Twitter https://twitter.com/FacesOfAO.

www.sercievewomen.org