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## **COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

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### **VA Officials Fail to Act to Protect Veterans Against Sexual Assault**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today, the Subcommittee on Health questioned members of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and several veterans service organizations (VSO) regarding the recent [GAO report](#) on sexual assaults at VA facilities. Although VA has formed a work group to begin to address the recommendations set forth by the GAO, it has not yet implemented a system-wide safeguard to protect veterans and VA employees from sexual assault.

“The gross failure of VA leadership to protect the safety and security of our veterans and VA staff and systematically report and respond to sexual assault and safety incidents is contemptible. This is not the way to run a health care system and it is certainly no way to treat the men and women who have sacrificed so much on our Nation’s behalf,” stated Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health. “I am very concerned with what I have heard today. It is not clear to me that VA has taken this report seriously, and came before this Committee unprepared to answer the questions that we, the public, and our veterans have.”

VA officials admitted that although some allegations from 2007-2010 have been investigated and prosecuted, it could not provide data for the 2010-2011 time period, a question posed by the Committee. VA officials also repeatedly cited confusion over jurisdiction in pursuing investigations.

“There must be zero tolerance for sexual assault in VA facilities. In the past week, some have dismissed these allegations, comparing the size of the VA system and the number of allegations, to the private sector. There is no comparison. Just one assault of this nature, one sexual predator, or one veteran’s rights being violated within the VA is one too many and is absolutely unacceptable,” stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. “The safety and security of our veterans is paramount and we pledge to stay on top of this developing situation within the VA to ensure that justice is done for victims and that this behavior never happens again.”

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