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MILITARY ENLISTMENT OF FELONS HAS DOUBLED Murder and Other Serious Crimes are Allowable Offenses

SANTA BARBARA, CA, February 14, 2007 - The number of convicted felons who enlisted in the U.S. military almost doubled in the past three years, rising from 824 felons in fiscal year 2004 to 1,605 in fiscal year 2006, according to a new study sponsored by the Michael D. Palm Center.

Titled "Balancing Your Strengths against Your Felonies: Considerations for Military Recruitment of Ex-Offenders," the study is forthcoming in the University of Miami Law Review. It was written and researched by Michael Boucai, who until recently was a visiting researcher at Georgetown University. Data for the study were obtained by the Palm Center from the Pentagon via Freedom of Information Act requests. [The data are posted at www.palmcenter.org].

The data indicate that from 2003 through 2006, the military allowed 4,230 convicted felons to enlist under the "moral waivers" program, which enables otherwise unqualified candidates to serve. In addition, 43,977 individuals convicted of serious misdemeanors such as assault were permitted to enlist under the moral waivers program during that period, as were 58,561 illegal drug abusers. In the Army, allowable offenses include making terrorist threats, murder, and kidnapping (pp. 35-36, Army Regulation 601-210, posted at www.palmcenter.org).

In the study, Boucai argues that a more forthright, well-informed, and humane public engagement with the question of ex-offender enlistment could help promote the development of policies and programs for more effectively integrating ex-offenders into the Armed Forces. According to Boucai, "The problem is not that the Armed Forces are letting in ex-offenders -- most of these recruits become fine service members, and military service often has strong rehabilitative effect. The real problem is that, increasingly, the military fails to also recruit the best and the brightest."

Dr. Aaron Belkin, Director of Michael D. Palm Center, said that while Americans often like to give citizens a second chance, it may be essential to design programming to assist ex-offenders adjust to the demands of service in the military. "The military may be missing an important opportunity to help itself as well as ex-offenders by being more fully forthcoming about the numbers and challenges involved," he said. The Michael D. Palm Center is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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