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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Secretary Panetta's Statement on Certification of Readiness to Implement Repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell

"Last December, this department began a careful and methodical process to prepare for the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

"Since then, the Repeal Implementation Team has worked to coordinate the necessary changes to policy and regulations, and to provide education and training to service members. This effort, led by Undersecretary of Defense Clifford R. Stanley, was designed to ensure the smoothest possible transition for the U.S. military to accommodate and implement this important and necessary change.

"Today, as a result of strong leadership and proactive education throughout the force, we can take the next step in this process. The President, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I have certified that the implementation of repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' is consistent with the standards of military readiness, military effectiveness, unit cohesion, and recruiting and retention of the armed forces. This certification decision was carefully made after receiving input from the service chiefs, service secretaries and from all the combatant commanders, who stated their views that the force is prepared for this change.

"With this certification, and in accordance with the law, on Sept. 20, 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' will be repealed. We will have taken the time necessary to get this done right and to ensure that service members are properly trained for a change that I believe is essential to the effectiveness of our all-volunteer force.

"All men and women who serve this nation in uniform -- no matter their race, color, creed, religion, or sexual orientation -- do so with great dignity, bravery, and dedication. As secretary of defense, I am committed to promoting an environment free from personal, social, or institutional barriers that prevent service members from rising to the highest level of responsibility that their talents and capabilities warrant. They put their lives on the line for America, and that's what really matters. Thanks to the professionalism and leadership of the U.S. military, we are closer to achieving the goal that is at the foundation of America -- equality and dignity for all."