

OPEN MILITARY SERVICE



Transgender people have served with distinction, but in silence, in every branch of our armed forces. According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, one in five transgender adults is a veteran¹. But while the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” in 2010 has allowed lesbian, gay, and bisexual troops to serve openly, transgender people are still forced to lie about who they are in order to serve their country.

The ban on open service for transgender people is not mandated by any law passed by Congress. The military maintains its own rules for who is eligible to serve, which can be changed without congressional action. The transgender ban is the result of archaic rules that treat transgender people as mentally and medically unfit, rules that are based on outdated, unfounded stereotypes. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members were also once deemed unfit. There

¹ *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, at 30.

is simply no basis in medical science or military need for excluding transgender people from serving openly. Just as there was no basis for believing that openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual service members were unfit to serve or harmful to good order, there is no basis for turning away or drumming out transgender people from our armed forces.

This policy ruins lives and careers, while squandering money and skills that our forces need to carry out their missions. Policies of this kind are rejected by a growing number of our military allies, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and others. The President and the Pentagon have the power and the responsibility to end this policy.

Policy steps

- The Department of Defense should revise military medical regulations to permit transgender people to serve openly.

“We’re an institution that values integrity and then asks other people to join us, work with us, fight with us, die with us, and lie about who they are the whole time they’re in the military. That’s what just doesn’t make any sense to me. And while they’re here and able to do that, even in the policy that we have, they are actually individuals who go through extraordinary pain to sustain that lie.”

–Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Adm. Michael Mullen, testifying on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” before the Senate Armed Services Committee, December 2, 2010