

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretaries Hegseth and Collins,

As Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I write to express my concern regarding this Administration's purge of transgender servicemembers in the United States Armed Forces as directed by Executive Order 14183, *Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness*, and to request information about preparations for the transition of these individuals to veteran status.

The Department of Defense's (DOD) recent memo, *Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness: Implementation Guidance*, dated May 15, 2025, raises several questions regarding how DOD will be able to implement such a policy while both protecting servicemembers' privacy and their access to the benefits and services they are entitled to after service. Historically, LGBTQ+ servicemembers discharged under similar policies such as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" often received less than honorable discharges, which have created lasting barriers to accessing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and services. Many of these veterans continue to seek discharge upgrades decades later. I have worked extensively on addressing these historical inequities and am concerned about the potential for similar issues to arise under this policy's implementation. As such, I request you provide information on the following:

1. How does DOD's policy directive for individualized medical record reviews comply with HIPAA and constitutional privacy protections?
2. What specific trainings have commanders received for handling protected health information?
3. What safeguards are in place to prevent misuse of medical information for punitive rather than medical readiness purposes?
4. For servicemembers affected by this policy who choose not to voluntarily separate, what type of discharge characterization will they receive — specifically, under what circumstances will characterizations of General (Under Honorable Conditions) be used?
5. What is the precise impact of JFF, JDK, and RE-3 codes on VA disability compensation, education benefits, and health care eligibility, as well as on Veterans' Preference in federal employment and future security clearances?
6. Why was the Temporary Early Retirement Authority implemented through exceptions to policy for servicemembers with over 15 years of active service, rather than being established as a standing policy?
7. Historically under policies like Don't Ask, Don't Tell, records of those separated have been sparse and inaccurate. How will DOD maintain appropriate records, accounting, and reporting of every servicemember separated under this policy?

I was also concerned to see DOD's current guidance for its purge of transgender servicemembers seems to imply not all such servicemembers are "entitled" to Transition Assistance Program (TAP) participation, and for those who are "entitled," TAP participation is only "strongly encouraged." I request assurance from your Departments that all affected servicemembers will receive full access to TAP and comprehensive information about their eligibility for VA benefits and services. Please provide details on how DOD is ensuring these servicemembers are properly informed of all available transition and VA enrollment resources, including:

1. What are the policies and procedures for out-processing transgender servicemembers, and do they have access to TAP, SkillBridge, and all other transition assistance services?
2. With thousands of servicemembers being simultaneously discharged under this policy, how will DOD provide warm hand-offs to VA and other relevant agencies for transgender veterans during TAP to mitigate risk of suicide or homelessness and ensure best-possible outcomes?

I also request information on what steps VA is taking to prepare for an influx in transgender veterans seeking care. Specifically:

1. What is VA's outreach plan for connecting with transgender servicemembers who have been or will be separated from the military under this policy?
2. How are LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinators at VA facilities being adequately resourced for an increase in demand?
3. What preparations are VA Liaisons for Healthcare making to assist with the DOD-to-VA health care transfer process?
4. Are Post-9/11 Military2VA Case Managers receiving appropriate guidance to address the unique needs of these transitioning servicemembers?
5. When will VA providers be given clinical guidance regarding the provision of hormone replacement therapy to servicemembers who were receiving this care at their time of separation, as outlined in Veterans Health Administration Notice 2025-01(1)?
6. What types of documentation and evidence will VA accept from current servicemembers as proof of receiving hormone replacement therapy during service?

Historical experience with discriminatory military policies demonstrates the risks of inadequate oversight, leading to decades of remedial legislation and veterans' benefits complications. This Administration's abrupt and cruel policy change targeting transgender servicemembers – with its compressed timeline, use of sensitive medical records, and disregard for the valiant service of our nation's heroes – demands rigorous congressional oversight, which I hope your Departments will comply with.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs