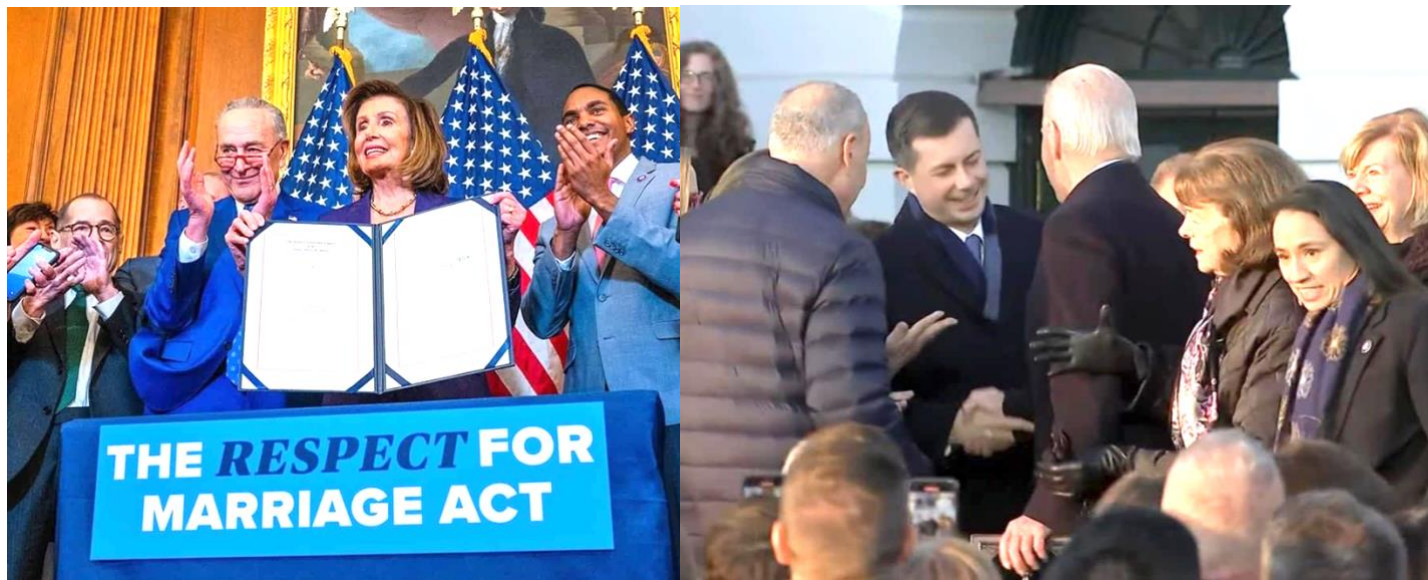


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### Respect for Marriage Act

On December 8, the House passed the Respect for Marriage Act. On December 13, **President Biden** signed the bill into law in an elaborate celebration on the South Lawn of the White House. President Biden hailed the bill as a “vital step toward equality, liberty, and justice, not just for some, but for everyone. Toward creating a nation where decency, dignity, and love are recognized, honored, and protected.” He continued, “Deciding whether to marry, and who to marry, is one of the most profound decisions a person can make. And as I’ve said before, and some of you might remember, on a certain TV show 10 years ago, I got in trouble. Marriage—I mean this with all my heart—marriage is a simple proposition: Who do you love, and will you be loyal with that person you love? It’s not more complicated than that.” The Respect for Marriage Act “recognizes that everyone should have the right to answer those questions for themselves without government interference. It also secures the federal rights, protections that come with marriage, like when your loved one gets sick and you’re legally recognized as a next of kin.” He concluded by saying “For most of our nation’s history, we denied interracial and same-sex

couples from these protections. We failed. We failed to treat them with an equal dignity and respect. And now, the law requires that interracial and same-sex marriage must be recognized as legal in every state in the nation.” The event included performances by **Sam Smith**, **Cyndi Lauper**, and the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington D.C. Also in attendance was **Vice President Harris**, and several members of the WH Cabinet, House, and Senate.



## Ban on Intersex Individuals Lifted

On November 16, 2022, the U.S. Department of Defense revised its regulations and removed the ban on intersex individuals serving in the military. Acceptance of intersex individuals to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces can vary. Often, they are allowed to serve but not in combat units. Much of the confusion stems from difficulties in determining where to place them in housing, often assigned by binary gender designations, or in consideration of complex medical issues they may pose. The specific prohibition was labelled as “major abnormalities or defects of the genitalia” or “hermaphroditism.” The **Palm Center** authored a policy memo, “DoD’s Accession Disqualifications Related to Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy Are Unrelated to Fitness and Inconsistent with Other Standards,” that demonstrated that the intersex ban was inconsistent with other medical standards, and was disqualifying fully fit applicants from military service. The memo was endorsed by 21 organizations, including the Center for American Progress, Endocrine Society, GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality, Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal, Modern Military Association of America, and the Transgender American Veterans Association. The memo was shared with Congress and Pentagon leadership. While a few consequences of intersex conditions remain disqualifying, those circumstances are rare. Though the Palm Center officially closed at the end of 2022, the organization had a tremendous influence in removing bans of those who wish to serve in the military. The impact of the Palm Center will resonate for LGBTQ servicemember for decades to come.

## San Diego Veterans Wall of Honor

Thirteen LGBTQ veterans, some posthumously, were inducted into the Benjamin F. Dillingham, III and Bridget Wilson LGBT Veterans Wall of Honor at the San Diego LGBT Community Center on November 10, 2022. **Jon Acosta** served in the Navy from 1972 to 1994 as a damage controlman in firefighting and fire system inspections. **Lark Bearden** was a Navy nurse in Vietnam, and recalled back to duty as a reservist in Operation Desert Shield/Storm. **Houston Burnside, Jr.**, enlisted in the U.S. Air Force at age 19 and served three years. He died in 2018 at age 66 in a traffic accident. **Thomas Carey** served in the U.S. Navy from 1964 to 1968. He died of AIDS in 1995. **Bob Carney**, also served in Vietnam with the U.S. Army in 1968 and wounded while serving. **Edward Conlon**, joined the U.S. Navy in 1946, who attended hospital corpsman school, and died in 2002 at the age of 74. **Beth F. Coye**, a retired Naval commander, served for 21 years, and left the service due to DADT. **Michael Donovan** joined the U.S. Air Force at age 19 and served as a computer operator. He was also discharged due to DADT. **David Huskey** who enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1968 spent a year in Vietnam before being discharged. **Michael W. Klein, Sr.**, was a operation specialist in the U.S. Navy after he enlisted in 1971. He worked at radar stations to protect Naval bases and later became an anti-submarine air controller. **Hector Edmundo Rodriguez** enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1999 and served in Iraq. **David Root** enlisted in the U.S. Army at age 18 and was stationed in Hawaii for three years. **Midori Hirakawa Sabanal** served in the U.S. Army from 1975 to 1982, and she worked in Germany and the U.S on the maintenance of combat support vehicles.

## In Memorium

David Digel, longtime member of GLBVA/AVER, passed away in November. David served in the U.S. Navy as an Electronics Engineer for four years until he was asked to leave under the DADT policy. Immediately after his discharge, he found the same job in the civilian world making four times as much. What a stupid policy and, as with others discharged under DADT, a loss for our country. David joined the GLBVA in the early 1990’s, and was an invaluable asset to our organization. Computers were just being made available to the general public, and David taught many of our members how to use them. We will miss him. David is survived by his lifetime partner, Charles Towne, who is also a U.S. Navy veteran. They contributed to many local and national Chicago organizations. *Fair winds and following seas.*



## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are Necessities in the U.S. Military

Some 41% of the military identify as members of minority groups, including LGBTQ individuals, and that numbers will continue to increase. “The military must be able to attract, train, and retain them for the services to retain competitive edges,” noted Bishop Garrison, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Defense for Human Capital and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Fewer Americans between the ages of 18 to 24—the prime ages for recruits—qualify for military service. In an address at the Center for a New American Security last year, he continued: “So, we have to find ways of getting to a broader talent pool and broader interest groups in order to bring those highly qualified, talented individuals in.” There is a noted drop in the engagement of minorities as they rise up the ranks. “Their numbers tend to begin to decline in terms of service; they tend to get out, and there could be a variety of reasons as to why that is. I would hope that as many of the leaders and members of the total force as possible see DEI efforts as a force multiplier.” Recruits from diverse backgrounds tend to provide more innovative thought and approaches to incredibly complex and complicated problems that are facing the national security apparatus today. He concluded by stating that “I want people to see DEI as another tool in the toolkit and another way of solving these problems.”

## Secretary Austin Delivers Holiday Message

On December 23, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and wife, Charlene, wished all servicemembers and their families happy holidays and thanked them for their service in a video holiday greeting. Austin also spoke over video teleconference with servicemembers from each branch of the armed forces to thank them and wish them happy holidays. He expressed his appreciation for their service in defense of the nation and the support they provide to our allies and partners around the world. He noted the professionalism with which all of these men and women continue to perform throughout the holiday season.



101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) in Poland



USS Chung-Hoon (Western Pacific)

## DoD Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan

Late last year, the Department of Defense released a strategic plan for 2022-2023 to attract, retain, and advance the best talent by advancing DEIA initiatives, building upon an earlier 2012-2017 DEI strategic plan. Multiple Executive Orders, signed by President Biden in January 2021 to advance equity were referenced, including E.O. 13988, “Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation.” Several goals that are outlined broaden the definition of underserved populations to include LGBTQ individuals.

## Monthly In-person AVER Meetings for the Chicago Chapter • Join Us!

We meet up every month on **First Thursdays** at 7pm (Chicago, Central time zone) at the **Center on Halsted**. **Everyone** is welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings **in-person** or via Zoom!! For Zoom, check the [averchicago.org](http://averchicago.org) website for the active link (click on the highlighted “Zoom” link near the bottom of the webpage) to get into the Zoom meeting. To join via audio: call 312-626-6799 with ID 488-863-384 and passcode 328090.

## VA Updates

While PACT Act benefits aren't available to all veterans until January 1, 2023, the VA began processing benefits immediately for eligible terminally ill Veterans in December. This ensures that terminally ill Veterans will receive their earned benefits and healthcare on the earliest possible date. Recall that the PACT Act (Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022) is intended to improve healthcare access and funding for Veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during military service. On January 1, the VA will prioritize the processing of PACT Act claims filed by Veterans with cancer, experiencing homelessness, older than 85 years old, experiencing financial hardship, and Medal of Honor and Purple Heart recipients. Since the PACT Act was signed into law on August 10, more than 176,000 Veterans have applied for PACT Act-related benefits.

Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2023, and President Biden signed it into law on December 23, 2022. The NDAA includes a 4.6% pay raise for servicemembers, increasing eligibility of families for the Basic Needs Allowance, enhanced financial reimbursement for working spouses, and more mental health studies and resources to combat suicide.

## Cook County Fans

The Cook County Clerk's Office and the County's Department of Veterans Affairs are offering veterans, active-duty personnel, and other members of the military a free discount card for reduced costs and benefits from hundreds of businesses in the Chicagoland area. For more information, visit [cookcountyclerk.com/Veterans](http://cookcountyclerk.com/Veterans). In addition, free tickets are available for Chicago Wolves hockey games; visit the Veterans website for more info.

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**Peace and Best Wishes  
in the New Year!**