

### **White House Reevaluates Process for LGBTQ Veterans**

The White House, Pentagon, and Veterans Administration are still in the process of reevaluating and assessing how the Department of Defense resolves the less than honorable discharges that many LGBTQ veterans received when they were discharged from the service before and when the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy was in effect. The DADT directive was issued on December 21, 1993, and went into effect during the Clinton Administration on February 28, 1994. It was repealed by President Obama on September 20, 2011; that’s almost 12 years ago. Over that time, an estimated 14,000 servicemembers were discharged from the U.S. military, and in some cases, discharges eliminated their benefits and access to VA loan programs, college tuition assistance, healthcare support, and some federal jobs. So how long does it take to process a request for review of a discharge under DADT? The Air Force says that its Board for the Correction of Military Records takes an average of 209 days, and its Discharge Review Board take an average of 114 days; the Navy says that its Board for the Correction of Naval Records takes 4-6 months, and its Naval Discharge Review Board takes 6-10 months. Thus, it can take 1-2 years to pursue a review, honorable discharge, and reinstatement of benefits.

### **Upcoming Chicago AVER Events**

**Chicago Memorial Day Parade.** Chicago AVER is marching in the Chicago Memorial Day Parade on Saturday, May 27. We’d love to recruit more people to march with us and help carry all of the service flags and AVER banner. The parade starts at noon, so please show up around 11-11:30am at West Wacker Street west of State Street. Otherwise, join the crowd and look for us as we march down State Street.

**Chicago Pride Parade.** Chicago AVER is also marching in the Chicago Pride Parade on Sunday, June 25. We need to **recruit about 50 people** to help carry all of the service flags, AVER banner, and huge U.S. flag. Street barricades go up early so try to join us around 10:45-11:15am north of Montrose on Broadway to get organized. If you are interested in joining us to march in the parade and carry the flag, please email [president@averchicago.org](mailto:president@averchicago.org) or [secretary@averchicago.org](mailto:secretary@averchicago.org). The parade follows Broadway south to Halsted, then south on Halsted to Belmont, east on Belmont to Broadway, and south on Broadway to Clark/Diversey, and then east to Lincoln Park. ***We really need your help to show off our pride, so please consider joining us and sign up now!!***

### **Rainbow Canadians – LGBT Purge**

Beginning in the 1950’s, LGBT members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the federal public service were targeted for systemic removal. Through stalking, spying, harassment, and harsh interrogation tactics, an estimated 9,000 lives were impacted; today it is known as the LGBT Purge. A documentary “The Fruit Machine” is available for viewing on the TVO website: <https://www.tvo.org/> or YouTube. The documentary covers the history of the LGBT Purge with interviews from survivors about their traumatic experiences. A monument honoring the LGBT Purge survivors is planned for a site at the Canadian Forces Base Borden in Ontario, Canada. CFB Borden, located just 60 miles north of Toronto, trains 20,000 military personnel annually, and employs about 3200 military members and 1500 civilians. “This monument will stand as a reminder of our collective history and our commitment to a better future,” said Colonel Jonathan Michaud, Commander of CFB Borden. He continued “It will encourage individuals to reflect on their role in the CAF and how they can contribute to culture change in the organization.” It will be the first of its kind erected at a Canadian military base. A Class Action lawsuit led to establishment of a \$100M reparations fund.

## **A Proclamation on the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lavender Scare**

Our Nation has made tremendous progress in advancing the cause of equality for LGBTQI+ Americans. To keep building on that progress, we must reflect honestly on the darkest chapters of our story and on how far we have come. Seventy years ago, as the Cold War set in, President Eisenhower signed an Executive Order banning LGBTQI+ Americans from serving in the Federal Government. This action codified a shameful chapter in our Nation's history known as the "Lavender Scare." It was a decades-long period when 5,000-10,000 LGBTQI+ Federal employees were investigated, were interrogated, and lost their jobs simply because of who they were and whom they loved.

On this anniversary, we acknowledge the importance of telling the complete history of our Nation, reflecting on the lives changed by this discrimination, honoring the courageous Americans who fought to end this injustice, and celebrating the contributions of today's proud LGBTQI+ public servants—including members of our Armed Forces.

Our Nation was founded on the sacred idea that all of us are created equal and deserve to be treated equally under our laws. But for so many members of the LGBTQI+ community, hate, discrimination, and isolation throughout our country's history have denied them the full promise of America. The Lavender Scare epitomized—and institutionalized—this injustice. As LGBTQI+ employees were forced out of the workforce, the Federal Government attempted to defend its policies by propagating false and hateful stereotypes—accusing this community of being a threat to our national security and unworthy of public trust. Employees who were fired under these policies often lost future employment, other opportunities, and even relationships with their own families. Many endured poverty and public disgrace. Some took their own lives as a result of the trauma they had to bear.

While this is a story of profound injustice, it is also a story of remarkable bravery. From seeking relief in the courts to picketing in front of the White House, activists stood up for their rights and helped lay the foundation for the modern-day LGBTQI+ civil rights movement. One such trailblazer was Franklin Kameny, an Army astronomer, who after being fired because he was gay, dedicated over fifty years of his life to activism and helping LGBTQI+ workers stand up for their rights. In 2009, I was proud to meet Fran Kameny in the Oval Office as President Obama and I officially expanded many Federal benefits to same-sex partners of Government employees.

I am equally proud to have mandated additional protections for the fundamental rights of LGBTQI+ leaders to the highest levels of Government, including the first openly gay Senate-confirmed Cabinet Secretary, the first two openly transgender Americans to be confirmed by the United States Senate, and the first open lesbian to achieve the rank of Ambassador. When Americans turn in to the daily White House briefing, they see the first openly gay White House Press Secretary representing my Administration on the world stage.

But this is just the beginning. I rescinded the discriminatory ban on transgender servicemembers, paving the way for these brave Americans to once again serve openly in the United States military. I signed an Executive Order on Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, taking additional steps to ensure that LGBTQI+ public servants are treated with dignity and respect. I also signed a landmark Executive Order charging the Federal Government to prevent and combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Federal agencies have since strengthened or clarified protections for LGBTQI+ Americans in housing, health care, education, employment, credit and lending services, and the criminal justice system. Just last year, I proudly signed the Respect for Marriage Act to defend the rights of LGBTQI+ and interracial couples.

The struggle for equal justice is not over. Today and in each generation, we must rededicate ourselves to ending the hatred and discrimination that LGBTQI+ Americans continue to face. That includes addressing a wave of discriminatory laws that target them—especially transgender children—and that echo the hateful stereotypes and stigma of the Lavender Scare. My Administration is standing firmly with brave LGBTQI+ Americans to push back against these injustices.

Great nations face their history openly and honestly: the good, the bad, and the truth. Today, we make our message simple to every public servant who suffered from the un-American policies and discrimination of the Lavender Scare: We see your sacrifices. We acknowledge what you lost and what you wrongfully endured. I have mandated my Administration to do all we can to write a new chapter of our American story that will demonstrate our abiding commitment to equal rights, respect for human dignity, and limitless opportunity for all.

Now, therefore, I, Joseph R. Biden Jr., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 27, 2023, as the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lavender Scare. I call upon government officials and the people of the United States of America to honor the contributions of LGBTQI+ public servants, to recognize the lives impacted by the Lavender Scare, and to celebrate the great diversity of the American people. --- President J. R. Biden Jr.

## Upcoming Local Area Events

**May 21. Ride for Warriors – Fisher House Fundraiser.** This is a fundraiser in support of building a Fisher House at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago. This is a 38-mile escorted ride from Miller Meadow Forest Preserve (1000 yards each of Hines VA at 8312 Roosevelt Rd, Forest Park, IL 60130), to Lake Shore Harley Davidson, 14000 Rockland Rd (Rte 176), Libertyville, IL 60048. 7am Setup, 8am Registration, and 10:30am Kick stands up. Riders \$35 and Passengers \$10. For more details: [www.fofhil.org](http://www.fofhil.org), call Michael Thompson at 708-846-8700 or email [assistance@fofhil.org](mailto:assistance@fofhil.org).

**May 23. Meals on Wheels Pantry.** Seniors, 55 and older, bring your grocery bags and shop at the Nourish Chicago Pantry, Central West Senior Center, 2102 W Ogden Ave, Chicago, 60612, 1-3pm.

**May 27-28. Rolling Thunder XXXV – Ride for Freedom.** The purpose of this ride is to remind the government to keep searching for our 82,000+ MIA's. May 27, 7:30pm, Candlelight vigil, Ft. Sheridan National Cemetery, Vattman Rd, Lake Forest, IL 60035. May 28, 8:30 Registration and 10am Start, Thunder XXXV Demonstration Parade, No fee. Stage at James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, 3001 Green Bay Rd, North Chicago, for 54-mile ride through Hines VA Hospital to Cantigny Park and 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division Museum, Wheaton. Food, vendors, music, RT swag, and museum tour. Check out Chapter 1 (Warrenville): [www.rollingthunderIL1.com](http://www.rollingthunderIL1.com); Chapter 2 (Wauconda): [www.rollingthunderIL2.org](http://www.rollingthunderIL2.org), Chapter 3 (Olney): [www.facebook.com/RTIL3](http://www.facebook.com/RTIL3).

**June 1. Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital**, 5000 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, Hines, 60141, will be raising a rainbow flag on campus at 11am. Everyone is invited to attend. For more information, contact Lorry Luscri, 708-202-8387, ext. 21228.

**June 17. Combined Veterans of Berwyn Sixth Annual Luncheon and Expo**, 12Noon – 6pm, with job fair (bring your resume) and BBQ (bring your appetite). All veterans eat free (with proof of service); non-veterans \$15/adult, \$5/child under 12. Morton West High School, 2400 Home Ave, Berwyn, 60402. For more information, call 708-512-4730 or email [combinedveterans@yahoo.com](mailto:combinedveterans@yahoo.com).

## Brotherly Love?

The Fairness Act, which would grant statewide anti-discrimination protections to LGBTQ+ individuals, recently passed the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in a 102-98 vote. Two Republicans joined 100 Democrats in voting for HB300. It's the first time that the bill has passed either of the two legislative chambers in 47 years. (It's an extension of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act of 1955.) The earliest version of the bill was introduced in 1976. HB300 seeks to amend the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity or expression to its list of protected classes; these extensions extend to housing, education, and public accommodations. The bill now heads to the Republican-majority State Senate where it is expected to be amended. State Representative Ben Waxman, who's district is nicknamed "Gayborhood," noted that it's still legal to deny various rights because you're gay. Pennsylvania is the only state in the northeast without statewide nondiscrimination protections for the LGBTQ+ community. On the local level, 73 municipalities in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania have passed nondiscrimination ordinances, but almost 2500, which include 65% of the populations, have no protections for LGBTQ+ people. We still have a long way to go!!

## 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.

**American Veterans for Equal Rights**, Chicago Chapter, P.O. Box 29317, Chicago, IL 60629, Telephone: 773-752-0058, [www.aver.us](http://www.aver.us) and [www.averchicago.org](http://www.averchicago.org). You can email any of the Chicago Chapter officers with the following address: [president@averchicago.org](mailto:president@averchicago.org), [secretary@averchicago.org](mailto:secretary@averchicago.org), or [treasurer@averchicago.org](mailto:treasurer@averchicago.org).

### You are loved

Karine Jean-Pierre, the first openly gay White House Press Secretary, noted that dozens of recent state bills are being considered that target LGBTQ kids and gender affirming care for youth, and set a dangerous precedent. “We are so proud of the kids across the country who have organized protests and school walkouts to tell the politicians in their states to stop this legislative bullying, said Jean-Pierre. She went on, “I know that these political attacks can really take a toll on people’s mental health. So I want to say directly to LGBTQI+ kids, you are loved just as you are, just the way you are.” For those bills passed into law, they continued to be challenged.

### VA Healthcare

If you are a Veteran who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or another related identity and facing a mental health challenge, seek help. Check out the VA site for more information on services, benefits, and your rights for adequate healthcare. You’ve earned it! <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/lgbtq-plus/>

### Veterans Access to Cannabis?

Many veterans struggle with PTSD, chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and other conditions related to the mental and physical stress from serving in the military. Multiple studies have shown cannabis effective in treating a variety of symptoms. In 2017, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine determined that there’s evidence cannabis can improve chronic pain symptoms in adults. For non-cancer chronic pain, evaluating 2000 patients, cannabis had significant pain-relieving effects, and reduced sleeping problems, muscle stiffness, and quality-of-life. Cannabis is also a more attractive alternative to the use of opioids, which can be misused and oversubscribed for pain relief. Unfortunately, veterans, under VA healthcare, are often denied access to cannabis due to the federal government’s ban as a Schedule I drug. Several states have legalized cannabis for medical use but veterans need to seek guidance from outside of the VA system. A recent poll found that 83% of Americans support legalizing medical cannabis. Perhaps it is time for the federal government to end the stigma about cannabis, recognize its potential as a safe and effective treatment option, and allow the VA to reconsider policies that would support veterans’ access to cannabis so they can get the proper treatment they need.

### Are You Ready for Pride Fest?

The lineup for the Chicago Pride Fest was announced last month. This year’s event is expected to include a youth pride space and a number of attractions as more than 60,000 attendees are expected. The event takes place the weekend before the annual Chicago Pride Parade. “We come together in June to celebrate community and uplift each other in the struggle for equality and human rights,” said Northalsted Vice President and lead event organizer Mark Liberson. “Despite decades of progress, the need for Pride has not lessened, as outright attacks, especially on transgender and BIPOC member of our community, are ongoing.”

In Copenhagen, Winter Pride is in February and the Pride Parade is in August. In Madrid, Pride celebrations are held from the last week in June to the first week in July. In New York City, Pride is celebrated throughout the month of June with the city hosting over 50 events and the parade on June 26. In Buenos Aires, Pride events are held from late October to early November. In Amsterdam, Pride is celebrated from late July to early August, with the parade along and through the UNESCO canals, from the Scheepvaart Museum through the city center towards the Amstel River. Sydney hosted an LGBTQ+ Mardi Gras festival in February with art, cinema, music, and sports. In Reykjavik, Pride will run for 10 days in August to mark its 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Iceland. Get ready!!

### = Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

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