

Rep. Pocan: With Reps. Hill, Schatz, and Gillibrand reintroduce legislation to restore Honor to Service Members discharged due to sexual orientation

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Legislation has 100 Democratic cosponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, as Americans celebrate LGBT Pride Month, U.S. Representatives Mark Pocan (WI-02) and Katie Hill (CA-25), along with U.S. Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), reintroduced the Restore Honor to Service Members Act. The legislation will correct the military records of service members discharged solely due to their sexual orientation to reflect their honorable service and reinstate the benefits they earned.

“We must correct the wrongs that the government committed when it dishonorably discharged veterans from the armed forces due to sexual orientation and ensure that these veterans receive the recognition and benefits they deserve,” said Pocan, Co-Chair of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus. “The Restore Honor to Service Members Act streamlines this process - ensuring that the service and sacrifices of our veterans are respected and valued in the eyes of our country - and I look forward to working with my colleagues to move this legislation forward.”

“There is no higher honor than service to our country - the stain of discriminatory practices have no business on the records of our brave LGBT service members,” said Hill. As the first LGBT woman to serve in Congress from the state of California and as the daughter and granddaughter of veterans, I know how critical it is to give

the individuals who have worn our uniform the proper respect, regardless of their gender or sexual identity. This bill is long overdue, and I am proud to support this legislation alongside Congressman Pocan and our colleagues.”

“This bill is about confronting past discrimination. Hundreds of thousands of gay and lesbian veterans were unjustly discharged from the military, and then denied access to the benefits and honorable service records that are rightfully theirs. This bill is a chance for us to make it right,” said Schatz.

“Veterans who honorably served our nation should not have to fight for their benefits,” said Gillibrand. “The Restore Honor to Service Members Act would clear discriminatory discharges they received on their records due solely to their sexual orientation. Our veterans deserve the recognition and benefits they earned for the sacrifices they made for our country, and I urge my colleagues to join me and pass this important bill.”

Since World War II, more than 100,000 Americans are estimated to have been discharged from the military because of their sexual orientation. Those forced out of the military may have left with discharge statuses of “other than honorable,” “general discharge” or “dishonorable,” depending on the circumstances. As a consequence, many of these service members may be disqualified from accessing certain benefits that they earned and are entitled to, and may not be able to claim veteran status. The consequences of a negative discharge also include preventing some veterans from voting or making it more difficult for them to acquire civilian employment.

Many veterans who were affected by discriminatory policies such as Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell do not know that they can have their records corrected or initiate a review. This legislation would require the Department of Defense to reach out to veterans who faced discrimination because of their sexual orientation about the Department’s process for correcting their records.

The legislation is supported by American Veterans for Equal Rights, VoteVets.org, OutServe-SLDN, and the Human Rights Campaign. The bill has 100 cosponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives and more than two dozen cosponsors in the U.S. Senate.