

PALM CENTER

BLUEPRINTS FOR SOUND PUBLIC POLICY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 13, 2016

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Palm Center Questions Pentagon Claim that Transgender Service is “Complicated”

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – As the Obama administration signals that defending transgender equality will be a major priority of its last year, Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter [said this week](#) that transgender military service “is complicated,” and he has so far declined to end the Pentagon’s discriminatory policy. His remarks come four months after the Pentagon missed its own deadline to review its transgender service ban, and experts are now warning that time may be running short. Military officials are aware of at least 77 transgender service members who are currently serving in limbo as they await a new policy, and scholars estimate that 12,800 transgender personnel are currently serving.

“The notion that ending discrimination is ‘complicated’ is belied by all the evidence,” said Palm Center director, Aaron Belkin, a visiting professor at the University of California, Hastings. **“This includes research commissioned and reviewed by the Pentagon itself, which has found that implementing inclusive policy is straightforward.”** Belkin also cited a commission report authored by several retired General Officers that exhaustively studied transgender service and determined that **“formulating and implementing inclusive policy is administratively feasible and neither excessively complex nor burdensome.”** According to the *New York Times*, the RAND Corporation recently completed a study, commissioned by the Pentagon, which [found](#) that ending the transgender ban **“would have minimal impact on the force”** and would be **“unlikely to harm unit cohesion.”** The Pentagon has refused to release the study.

Belkin said that calling a policy change “complicated” can signal a lack of political will, and a possible capitulation to fears and biases of military brass. At least 18 foreign militaries allow service by transgender personnel, and all U.S. federal agencies, including the CIA and FBI, as well as numerous police and fire departments, have implemented trans-inclusive policy. He pointed to a Palm Center [memo](#) describing fourteen instances when the Pentagon completed reviews of key military policies in two to six months. **“The research and the path forward are clear,”** he said. **“It’s now a matter of whether the Obama administration will put its money where its mouth is.”**

The slowdown comes as the Obama administration is making a major push for transgender equality in schools and by taking a forceful stand against an anti-transgender North Carolina law by filing suit against the state. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said in announcing the suit that “the entire Obama Administration” stands with

transgender Americans and “will do everything we can to protect you going forward.” She said that “none of us can stand by” and allow “state-sponsored discrimination against transgender individuals,” raising questions about when the Defense Department will end its own discriminatory policy.

The Palm Center is preparing to release a legal finding by one of the nation's top military law experts who has concluded that the military's policies on transgender personnel violate federal law.

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About The Palm Center:

The Palm Center is an independent research institute committed to sponsoring state-of-the-art scholarship to enhance the quality of public dialogue about critical and controversial issues of the day. Our research has been published in leading social scientific journals and extensively consulted and cited by the US military and others. The Palm Center seeks to be a resource for scholars, policymakers, journalists, opinion leaders, students and the public at large. For more information, visit us at www.palmcenter.org.