

Retired Generals and Admirals Warn of Grave Consequences to Transgender Military Ban

We issue this statement out of grave concern that attempts to defend the transgender military ban in court will undermine the integrity of United States military judgment. Rather than being “based on professional military judgment,” as some [have asserted](#), this policy contradicts the actual judgment of both current and former senior military leaders, as well as medical research and the experiences our own military and of other militaries. In truth, a solid wall of military sentiment opposes discrimination.

Military judgment is a solemn responsibility of each Commander-in-Chief and of the military chain of command. In a polarized climate, the defense of anti-transgender discrimination using “military judgment” as a pretext risks inflicting harms that go well beyond the context of transgender service, threatening trust in the national security apparatus.

We affirm that transgender Americans should have the same opportunity to serve in our armed forces—and be held to the same health and fitness standards—as everyone else. We stand with the Service Chiefs of all five military branches who have testified that transgender-inclusive service—which has been policy for over 2.5 years—has succeeded, while discrimination and double standards harm combat effectiveness by wasting talent and compromising military integrity. And we stand with our fellow Servicemembers currently putting their lives at risk for our security—who made the same commitment, and deserve the same treatment, as every American who has ever worn our nation’s uniform.

As so much of our national dialogue becomes subsumed in heated rhetoric, we urge both public officials and the American people to consider carefully the following facts about transgender military service:

- 1 **Military leadership is unanimous that inclusive service has not harmed readiness.** All [five military Chiefs of Staff](#) have stated that inclusive service has been a success, with JCS Chairman-designate Mark Milley [reporting “precisely zero” problems](#). Current JCS Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford supports retention of transgender troops, [stating](#), “I believe any individual who meets the physical and mental standards, and is worldwide deployable and is currently serving, should be afforded the opportunity to continue to serve.”
- 2 **The Pentagon’s most exhaustive study of transgender service already found that inclusion works.** DOD spent over a year in 2015 and 2016 studying the implications of transgender service, and commissioned the RAND Corporation to assess the topic as well. [RAND concluded](#) that evidence from similar personnel policy changes suggested that transgender inclusion would have “no significant effect on unit cohesion, operational effectiveness, or readiness.” Another DOD [comprehensive review](#) of equal treatment policies found that military predictions “tend to overestimate negative consequences, and underestimate the U.S. military’s ability to adapt” and integrate diverse populations into the force. In contrast, the report that DOD issued after its 2017-2018 review process did not offer any evidence that inclusive policy has compromised readiness, pointing instead to hypothetical concerns, even though inclusive policy had been in effect for almost two years when the report was issued.

- 3 **Dozens of retired officers believe the transgender ban is harmful to, not necessary for, national security.** A group of 56 retired Generals and Admirals [said in a statement](#) that a transgender ban “would cause significant disruptions, deprive the military of mission-critical talent, and compromise the integrity of transgender troops who would be forced to live a lie, as well as non-transgender peers who would be forced to choose between reporting their comrades or disobeying policy.” The two most recent JCS chairmen, [General Martin Dempsey](#) and [Admiral Mike Mullen](#), join the current chairman in supporting transgender service. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, former Commander of U.S. and International Forces in Afghanistan, [recently said](#) that, “If we have people who want to serve, if they have the desire, the capacity to serve, I think it’s a mistake to lose that talent.”
- 4 **The medical establishment has uniformly repudiated the ban’s rationale.** The overwhelming consensus from the American medical establishment is that the transgender ban, which DOD has justified largely on the basis of the purported medical unfitness of transgender troops, is not based on any persuasive medical rationale. The reasoning for the ban has been repudiated by the [American Medical Association](#), the [American Psychological Association](#), the [American Psychiatric Association](#), and in a statement by [six former Surgeons General](#), who concluded that DOD had “mischaracterized the robust body of peer-reviewed research on the effectiveness of transgender medical care,” ignoring a “global medical consensus that such care is reliable, safe, and effective.”
- 5 **Retired military Surgeons General issued a major report repudiating the transgender ban.** A panel of [retired military Surgeons General](#)—the senior medical officers in their Services—released a comprehensive report last year finding that DOD’s rationale for the transgender ban is “wholly unpersuasive” and “is contradicted by ample evidence clearly demonstrating that transition-related care is effective, that transgender personnel diagnosed with gender dysphoria are deployable and medically fit, that inclusive policy has not compromised cohesion and instead promotes readiness, and that the financial costs of inclusion are not high.”
- 6 **Former defense officials say the transgender ban ignores military judgment and weakens our security.** A [legal brief](#) signed by 33 retired officers and senior defense officials opposes the ban, noting that the sudden declaration by the Commander-in-Chief that transgender troops must be banned, with no reference to “interceding events or new facts that plausibly justify it,” suggest that “the decision was the result of White House-driven politics, rather than an evidence-based judgment of the need for reform.” The step “can only weaken our security, by affording the president far too great a latitude to abuse his power over Servicemembers, without regard for military judgment or exigency.”
- 7 **Financial cost is not a compelling reason for the ban.** DOD has argued that allowing transgender service would incur excessive financial costs, but these claims do not withstand scrutiny. According to DOD’s own figures, the [cost for transition-related care in FY2017 was \\$2.2 million](#), which amounts to less than one tenth of a percent of its annual health care budget for the Active Component. Former Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has called this amount mere “budget dust.”
- 8 **U.S. allies have successfully opened military service to transgender individuals.** [Eighteen allied military forces](#) allow transgender service, and no evidence has emerged that inclusion has harmed readiness. RAND’s in-depth study of militaries in Australia, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom [found](#) “no significant effect of openly serving transgender service members on cohesion, operational effectiveness, or readiness.”

Brigadier General Clara Adams-Ender, USA (Retired)
Vice Admiral Donald Arthur, USN (Retired)
Major General Juan G. Ayala USMC (Retired)
Major General Donna Barbisch, USA (Retired)
Rear Admiral Jamie Barnett, USN (Retired)
Brigadier General David Brahms, USMC (Retired)
Brigadier General LeAnne P. Burch, USA (Retired)
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Rear Admiral Chris Cole, USN, (Retired)
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Brigadier General, John Douglass, USAF (Retired)
Major General Paul Eaton, USA (Retired)
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Brigadier General Evelyn "Pat" Foote, USA (Retired)
Lieutenant General Robert Gard, USA (Retired)
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Lieutenant General Arlen D. Jameson, USAF (Retired)
Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, USA (Retired)
Major General Dennis Laich, USA (Retired)
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