# Defense Secretary Delays Start Date For Military's Allowance of Transgender Recruits

BY TIMOTHY H. POWELL • JULY 13, 2017

U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis announced on June 30 that the Pentagon has approved a six-month delay of the start date for allowing transgender recruits to enlist in the military. In 2016, former Defense Secretary Ash Carter lifted the ban on transgender service members' ability to serve openly, stating in an article by NBC News that "this is the right thing to do for our people and for the force." As part of this process, the Department of Defense set July 1, 2017 as the date for the military to begin enlisting transgender service members. As announced in 2016, the Department's policy would have required individuals to complete any medical treatment that their doctor had determined was necessary in connection with their gender transition, and to be "stable in their preferred gender" for 18 months, as certified by their doctor, before entering the military.

Secretary Mattis announced that this decision would be delayed until January 1, 2018. The Department plans to use the additional time to evaluate the impact of such recruits on "readiness and lethality." Mattis stated that "this action in no way presupposes the outcome of the review" and does not change the policies currently in effect, including the policy of allowing those currently enlisted to serve openly as transgender.

Nevertheless, several military LBGT advocacy groups, including OutServe – Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and The American Military Partner Association, have decried the delay. Advocates state that lifting the ban allows the military to recruit the best talent, regardless of transgender status, and cite to a 2016 RAND Corporation study that found open service would have a "minimal impact on readiness." Despite Secretary Mattis' statements, there is reason to believe that the military may revert back to its transgender ban: on June 28, 2017 Missouri Representative Vicky Hartzler sponsored an amendment to the House's defense authorization bill that would have prevented transgender people from serving. Rep. Hartzler stated that she was pleased with the decision to delay the enlistment policy, and will continue to press for a full reversal of the Defense Department's transgender policy. Stay tuned for further developments as this issue is revisited by the Pentagon and the Congress later this year.

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