

June 5, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Secretary Hegseth:

We write to express our ongoing opposition to the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) destructive and foolhardy ban on transgender servicemembers, as outlined in the May 15, 2025, memorandum entitled "Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness: Implementation Guidance." We have already written to condemn the ban itself. Transgender servicemembers are not political props; they are patriotic Americans serving honorably. Banning them from service will compromise good order and discipline, take deployable servicemembers out of the fight and create national security risks felt for years to come. Your recent implementation guidance makes matters worse.

The May 15<sup>th</sup> memorandum compromises commanders by making them informers on their own troops in areas outside of their expertise. Per that guidance, commanders of servicemembers who, in their judgment, display "gender dysphoria, a history of gender dysphoria, or symptoms consistent with gender dysphoria will direct individualized medical record reviews of such Service members." Generally, commanders are not trained in medicine, psychology or mental health and are therefore not qualified to assess the members of their units for symptoms of mental health diagnoses. By stating that unit commanders "will direct" reviews of the medical records of servicemembers under their command, despite the fact that they are not equipped to do so, you are requiring them to perform a duty—for purely political reasons—that is far outside the scope of their normal operational and warfighting-centric responsibilities. This burden is corrosive to unit cohesion, trust and the wellbeing of the servicemember and the commanders, who are being failed by their chain of command. This is not leadership.

Additionally, the Department's discharge guidance punishes those who have volunteered to serve. The guidance, which mandates separating transgender officers using the JDK separation code "on the basis that their continued service is not clearly consistent with the interests of national security," is unjustifiable.<sup>1</sup> There is ample evidence that these servicemembers, many of whom are decorated with years of honorable service and all or nearly all of whom are otherwise deployable, are assets to their units and to the force.<sup>2</sup> Your DoD has failed to produce any

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness: Implementation Guidance," May 15, 2025, <https://media.defense.gov/2025/May/15/2003715662/-1/-1/0/PRIORITIZING-MILITARY-EXCELLENCE-AND-READINESS-IMPLEMENTATION-GUIDANCE.PDF>.

<sup>2</sup> Devin Coon, Paula M. Neira, and Brandyn D. Lau, "Threats to United States Fully Reviewed and Strategic Plan for Integration of Transgender Military Members into the Armed Forces," *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 7 (July 2018): 892–94, <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304454>; Lolita C. Baldor, "How the military is dealing with Hegseth's order to remove transgender troops," May 9, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/transgender-troop-ban-hegseth-pentagon-45c8eeec86c3148eadf63ff8d709f00b#>; Joshua Barajas, "Trans troops facing removal from U.S.

meaningful evidence to suggest otherwise, much less to prove that transgender servicemembers threaten national security. Using this discharge code is not only cruel; it's stupid. Beyond insulting brave individuals who have sacrificed to serve their country, this further ensures that the DoD or other security agencies will not be able to hire these individuals in a civilian capacity, robbing the national security establishment that protects everyday Americans of any opportunity to benefit from the skills and expertise these unreasonably separated servicemembers have gained at great expense to the taxpayer.

Beyond those process failures, your last response declined to answer several critical questions, answers to which are vital for Congress' ability to oversee your Department. Ongoing litigation is no excuse; the taxpayers have a right to know your reasons and evidence. Please explain:

1. What is the anticipated cost of implementing this policy, including all costs for separation, legal defense, investments made in these brave servicemembers that will no longer be recouped and the cost to train their replacements? How much more expensive is it than retaining these servicemembers?
2. What specific information, data or evidence, if any, serve as the basis for the statement that allowing transgender troops to serve is "not clearly consistent with the interests of national security"?
3. What consultations, studies and/or assessments were conducted (internally or externally) to evaluate the impact of this policy prior to implementation?

We trust that you will either include copies of all such reports, briefs or findings with your response, or specify that no such evidence exists.

Your policy will harm our armed services' operational readiness and lethality, not only endangering Americans, but costing billions of dollars in taxpayer money in service of a political stunt meant to attack a small, extraordinarily brave group of people. Servicemembers' privacy is being invaded, their livelihoods are being threatened and they are being used as a political tool to appeal to a minority of Americans.

Mr. Secretary, do not implement this ban.

Sincerely,



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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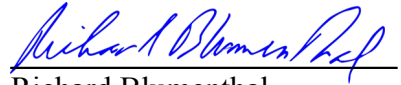
John Fetterman  
United States Senator

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military wrestle with uncertain future," May 14, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/trans-troops-facing-removal-from-u-s-military-wrestle-with-uncertain-future>; Joanne Haner, Luis Martinez, and Sabina Ghebremedhin, "Transgender military members react to 'jarring' Pentagon memo," February 28, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/transgender-military-members-react-jarring-pentagon-memo/story?id=119260758>.



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



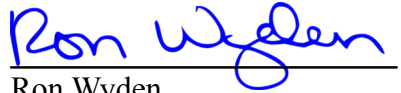
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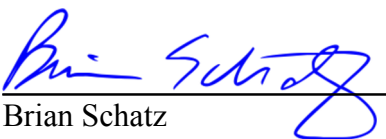
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Jacky Rosen  
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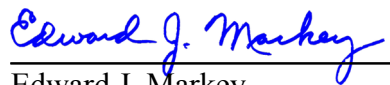
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Sheldon Whitehouse  
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