



## **“We Serve All Who Serve”: Recognizing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Veterans, and their Caregivers**

The topic for this presentation is, “We Serve All Who Serve”: Recognizing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Veterans and their caregivers

The VA values the enduring and committed care that is provided by Veteran caregivers. Veteran caregivers serve this country and their Veteran loved ones, day in and day out, sometimes for years on end. They provide support and hands on care to assist and maintain the Veteran’s independence and functioning in the community.

Veteran Caregivers working in the background make many sacrifices to give of their time, energy, and attention to care for a Veteran loved one. The sacrifices made are significant. Despite the fact that your efforts may not make headlines, the gift of your care has a dramatic impact. The VA has made great strides engaging this critical safety net of Veteran caregivers. We acknowledge your needs and value the care you provide.

The VA recognizes caregivers as the unsung heroes who form this critical safety net for ill and injured Veterans. Are you an LGBT caregiver, or family caregiver of an LGBT Veteran who is providing the ongoing support necessary to manage some of the physical, medical, and psychological struggles that result from military service and the challenges of aging? These are the caregivers we wish to connect with in this group.

In this group we will focus our attention on the unique experience and challenges of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Veterans and their LGBT caregivers. We will explore the impact of the long history of discrimination this group has experienced and will discuss the impact of being without the legal protections against discrimination in military service, healthcare, employment, marriage, and housing for the LGBT community both past and present. We will also identify the adaptations, strengths, and resilience that many LGBT individuals have developed having faced such challenges. Finally, given your vulnerabilities and strengths we will identify strategies to assure that LGBT Veterans and their caregivers are armed with the knowledge of your current rights and provided tools to negotiate the challenges that you continue to confront.

LGBT citizens have served in the military fighting to protect and preserve our country and its values of democracy since our very beginnings. They have served in silence, suffered illness, injury, and given their lives, to protect the freedoms we hold



dear. Many LGBT citizens have suffered from overt acts of violence and most have endured and still endure the impact of discrimination affecting the most fundamental and wide-ranging rights and privileges afforded to their heterosexual counterparts.

Despite all of the efforts and progress that has been made to expand Constitutional Civil rights and protections to this country's LGBT citizens, the legacy of injustice, discrimination, and violence remain, and their impact continues to be felt by many. As was stated in the Presidential Proclamation during LGBT Pride Month 2015 by President Obama "We are not truly equal until every person is afforded the same rights and opportunities".

Despite this powerful and righteous movement towards civil rights and equality, the threads of trust and hope are fledgling and fragile. While it is heartening to see how far we have come ensuring that all of our citizens are afforded the same rights and opportunities, discrimination and its legacy remains very much alive. The work to move towards a more just and perfect union continues. Current inequalities and the impact of history remain alive in the hearts and minds of all of you that have suffered and that still suffer the consequences of bigotry and inequality.

How has this history of injustice, discrimination, alienation, violence and silence shaped the lives of LGBT Veterans, and their LGBT caregivers? How does this legacy shape the most fundamental aspects of how you live your life? How has it impacted, and how does it continue to impact your emotional and mental wellbeing, your family relations, your employment, healthcare, housing, or financial security? These are some of the areas that we will be examining.

Who are the LGBT Veteran caregivers that we are addressing in this presentation? Are you the LGBT Veteran spouse or significant other? Maybe you are the parent, son, daughter, sister, or brother who is caring for an LGBT Veteran. You may be a friend who understands the struggle, and has been a member of the Veteran's support network. Certainly each of you has a unique relationship to the LGBT Veteran. Despite the unique nature of your relationship, it is essential that you appreciate the impact of this legacy of discrimination and that you are able to arm yourself with the knowledge needed to successfully advocate and care for yourself and your loved one.

In order to identify strategies that support you, we must first explore the implications of the history of discrimination and the current barriers that the LGBT Veteran and LGBT caregiver may face. We will discuss some of the vulnerabilities, the existing barriers and the potential strengths that may be unique to LGBT citizens. We



hope to help you, LGBT caregivers and caregivers of LGBT Veterans, negotiate the sometimes stormy and changing landscape along your path.

The burden of prejudice and discrimination that LGBT individuals have suffered has resulted in both vulnerabilities as well as strengths. Why is it important to recognize these resulting vulnerabilities and strengths? Well, if one is able to identify their vulnerabilities they are more able to work around them or with them to plan more effectively for the future. If on the other hand you are aware of your strengths, you can draw on them when challenges arise.

Let's begin by discussing what in general contributes to the support and wellbeing of any caregiver. What are the critical challenges and needs that you may encounter as a caregiver? What are the supports and resources that help you maintain your health and wellbeing, while expending the effort to care for another?

All Caregivers to some degree or another will negotiate balancing time, energy, and attention to care for their loved one and themselves. This is a reality for caregivers whether you are LGBT or not. You will require care and attention in order to stay in balance. The support and resources that are available to the Veteran and the caregiver can significantly impact the experience of illness, injury and the caregiving experience. Supports and resources such as family, friends, community, employment, housing, financial and medical supports all contribute to the experience of caregiving.

These essential supports and resources are needed, and their availability may be impacted by LGBT status. What resources and supports might be impacted when you are a LGBT Veteran or LGBT caregiver? What unique consideration does a caregiver who is not LGBT need to be aware of when advocating for their LGBT Veteran? The more knowledge that you have about the concerns, issues and rights of your loved one, the better able you will be to advocate for yourself and for them.

When we consider the aspects that contribute to all caregiver's ability to care for themselves, one of the most significant aspects to consider is that of supportive relationships. Whether you are the significant other of an LGBT Veteran, or a non-LGBT child, parent or family caregiver of a LGBT Veteran, the ability to be sensitive to the issues that arise for this group and your ability to advocate for the rights of your loved one will be bolstered by the supportive social connections available to you.

What is the impact of LGBT status in maintaining a source of social and relational support? How has the Veteran's or your status as LGBT individual impacted relations with parents, siblings, children, extended family, employer, church or community?



How many of you were alienated or cut off from the continued support of family? Were you threatened with or experienced the loss of your children's custody? How many of you lead dual lives because family was unwilling to recognize or welcome your significant other? How many of you have been rejected by your church community? Have you experienced being no longer welcomed at holiday's celebrations or family events? Have you been forced to choose between celebrating with family or with your significant other? Were you ever kicked out of your family home or cut out of family inheritance due to coming out? This fundamental gift of family connection may have been significantly damaged or completely severed by so many of you as a result of your LGBT status.

These are and have been some of the real life implications for LGBT individuals. What happens when the needed support of family or community is compromised? How are you more vulnerable and how have you adapted to become more resilient as result of this challenge?

LGBT older adults, as compared to their heterosexual counterparts, are twice as likely to age as a single person, twice as likely to live alone, and three to four times less likely to have children to support them. LGBT older adults report higher rates of social isolation than the wider population of older adults. Social isolation has a clear and detrimental impact on one's ability to cope, both with medical, and mental illness, as well as coping with the challenges of caregiving.

Social networks contribute substantially to your health and wellbeing and when family support has been lost or compromised, isolation may be a greater risk to one's overall wellbeing. Support and connection to others is essential and even more critical if you are ill or if you are caring for an ill loved one.

The majority of caregiving in this country is provided by informal caregivers, usually a spouse, child, grandparents and parents. Although many of you have children and grandchildren, when compared to heterosexual counterparts, LGBT individuals are three to four times less likely to have children to depend on for support with aging.

Another avenue that caregivers will look to for support is community support agencies, however, many formal community supports have contributed to the legacy of isolation with policies and practices that actively alienate and discriminate against LGBT individuals. In a 1994 survey 46% of Area Agencies on Aging surveyed, reported that LGBT people would not be welcome in their Senior Center if their orientation was known, and likewise 72% of LGBT people surveyed related they would be apprehensive about accessing Area Agency services due to lack of trust. While this study was



conducted some 20 years ago, LGBT Seniors continue to face increased vulnerabilities due to their LGBT status.

The LGBT Elder Americans Act originally introduced to Congress in 2012 and again reintroduced in 2015 hopes to address the unique vulnerabilities of LGBT elders and would designate LGBT elders as a population of “greatest social need” thereby providing directives and funding requiring federal aging services and programs to better meet the growing need of LGBT seniors.

Despite progress being made towards change, many LGBT individuals either do not have access to needed supports, or do not seek access due to concerns about fair treatment and discrimination. Again, while reluctance to reach out for support is understandable, it is so critical to establish the support that you need. Certainly, as we said before the tides are turning and greater protections have been put in place to assure equal and fair treatment.

Next, let us explore the impact of LGBT status for our nation’s military Servicemembers and Veterans. Our nation's military and Veterans are no strangers to the consequences of the history of prejudice and discrimination towards LGBT citizens. Despite the significant achievements made, we cannot ignore the continued struggle against discrimination experienced by those currently serving, nor the thousands who served in silence, those unjustly discharged, and those military Servicemembers and Veterans that suffered as a result of their LGBT status.

How many of you LGBT Veterans lived with the fear and anxiety of being found out and discharged. Did you lead a separate life in order to maintain your military career? How many have been discharged after years of distinguished military careers without the rightful benefits of such an investment in service? Do you hide your LGBT status from military or Veteran comrades for fear of being rejected or alienated? Maybe you have witnessed and even experienced violence as a result of your LGBT status. Have you hidden that you are LGBT from your VA providers for fear of being discriminated against in your care? Have you struggled to live with the reality that you sacrificed so much for your country and have not been afforded the same equal rights afforded to others under the law? As caregivers, recognition and sensitivity to the impact of this discrimination on your LGBT Servicemember or Veteran can play a significant role in providing support, advocacy and healing for your loved one.

The legacy of injustice remains a continued struggle and a lingering injury despite the progress. Understanding your rights and advocating for fair treatment remains a personal and sometimes uphill battle. It is the brave advocates that join you



in this daily struggle towards equality who have and will continue to press for the change that benefits all.

It is important to be aware the LGBT community shares similar vulnerabilities as other minority or oppressed groups, with a higher prevalence of physical and mental health risks due to stresses of minority status. LGBT individuals may be more likely to avoid seeking out healthcare until serious problems arise and often don't disclose their LGBT status due to experiences of rejection or disrespect in healthcare settings or by healthcare providers. Avoiding regular medical care or mental health care increases the risk when these potential risks are not identified or addressed early.

Many LGBT individuals face homophobia and poor quality care from the residents and staff members in long-term care facilities if they reveal their status. Finding home care providers willing to come to your home or provide care has been a struggle for many if your identity was revealed. Consider the profound impact when medical providers and care communities do not recognize the most significant relationships in your life particularly when you need them the most.

In the realm of mental healthcare, there is a long and painful history of discriminatory psychiatric and psychological practices suffered by LGBT individuals with untold costs. Interpretations of LGBT individuals as pathologically deranged, abnormal, unsound or worse, caused great suffering, resulted in forced hospitalizations, tragic medical interventions, and treatments intended to alter who you are.

This mistreatment, however misinformed or unintended, at the hands of the medical and mental health community, has furthered isolation and reinforced the need for silence on the part of many. Think of what the experience may be when you are unable to comfortably share with your providers who you are, who you partner or spouse is, particularly when you need their support the most.

Next, I would like to mention just some of the many rights and protections that have been denied to LGBT citizens. Unless you have been denied these rights and protections you may be unaware of the impact. The LGBT individuals that have lived with the consequences of being denied these protections can attest to the vulnerability and suffering that result from the lack of equal rights and protections. Let's explore some of these and their effect and consider these in relation to LGBT caregivers and LGBT Veteran care.

There are innumerable rights and protections that most take for granted that are not equally afforded to LGBT citizens. Rights related to marriage, employment,





housing, healthcare, insurance, retirement, inheritance, social security, taxes are among the many areas where LGBT citizens have faced and still face significant inequality.

What do these inequalities look like in real life terms? The impact on military service members and Veterans ranges from discharge from service, loss of careers, loss of pensions and lost Veteran benefits. There are over 1100 benefits and protections afforded married couples that until the Supreme Court's Ruling in June 2015 were denied same sex couples. While the federal government now recognizes same sex married couples, many of the state laws still interfere with fully accessing all benefits.

While equality and Federal rights for all citizens may have become the law of the land, in some areas of the country, LGBT individuals are not afforded full rights and protections due to the lack of protections in the State where they currently reside. Rights such as access to the Family Medical Leave Act, spousal medical insurance, retirement benefits, inheritance, taxes to name just a few, contribute to the legacy of injustice and remain ongoing barriers.

Until very recently, you could be denied the right to visit your significant other in the hospital when visitation is limited to family of origin. You can be denied housing or access to aging services, adult care or nursing facilities due to your LGBT status. Long-term care facilities may not recognize LGBT relationships and separate individuals in long-term relationships. The list of inequities is a lived experience by real people who have suffered and still suffer from their weight. The experience of injustice has many faces and each of you has a unique story. What is your story of injustice? What is your Veteran's story?

How can we look towards progress for the future? Thankfully, the tide is slowly turning towards justice. What do you need as a caregiver, a spouse, a family member, or friend of an LGBT Veteran, to support your rights? What is needed to support the positive forward momentum to ensure that Veterans and their caregivers are supported and recognized with equal rights and benefits? What can be done to lift the silence and welcome these deserving troops into the open?

Next let's move on to identifying the current status of rights and build on the resilience that has brought you and the Veteran through such struggles. Knowing your rights and building on your strengths and resources will serve you well when facing your current caregiving journey.



Let us begin our discussion with the changes that have come as a result of repealing "Don't Ask Don't Tell." The repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell", which took effect September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 allows Lesbian and Gay Americans to serve openly in our Armed Services. In the words of President Obama, "As of today, patriotic Americans in uniform will no longer have to lie about who they are in order to serve the country they love. As of today, our armed forces will no longer lose the extraordinary skills and combat experience of so many gay and lesbian service members. And today, as Commander in Chief, I want those who were discharged under this law to know that your country deeply values your service."

This legislative achievement supports this nation's lesbian and gay Servicemembers and protects them from unjust discharge. In June of 2016, the Pentagon also ended the last barrier to serving in the military by ending the ban on openly transgender people. The Defense Secretary, Ash Carter related, "We're eliminating policies that can result in transgender members being treated differently than their peers based solely upon their gender identity rather than their ability to serve." In March 2018 however, the Trump-Pence administration implemented a ban on transgender individuals from joining the military, and prohibits anyone currently serving from transitioning genders despite testimony by each military branch Chief of Staff that transgender troops have served openly and successfully since 2016, many of whom were deployed to combat zones with no impact on readiness. The struggle continues in Congress and in the courts to pursue a return to justice for transgender individuals.

The VA is deeply committed to promoting an inclusive, welcoming, patient-centered care environment for all its LGBT Veterans and their families. VA not only is committed to supporting an inclusive environment for its Veterans but its LGBT employees as well, with policies, practices, education and training that supports the rights and values of the LGBT community.

Since 2009, VA has included equal opportunity protections for employees on the basis of sexual orientation and protections based on gender identity. VA has issued policy directives, on respectful delivery of care to transgender and intersex individuals and is providing training for providers regarding delivery of healthcare to transgender Veterans.

In 2010, VA issued a policy providing visitation rights in support of the needs of LGBT Veterans. LGBT Veterans deserve individualized and patient centered healthcare that regards your whole person with respect. The VA is committed to that investment and supports your right to it. The LGBT Veteran, your spouse, significant other, your





family caregivers, are now on the right side of policies and protections to ensure fair, equal, respect for you and the significant loved ones that support you. So, expect fair treatment by your VA providers and know that VA assures you have recourse if you are not afforded the respect and care that you deserve. VA has developed avenues for employees, Veterans, dependents, or support persons to anonymously raise concerns or ask questions via contacting the LGBT workgroup at [LGBTWorkgroup@va.gov](mailto:LGBTWorkgroup@va.gov).

Your LGBT status is important knowledge for medical providers to have in order to remain sensitive to your unique healthcare issues. It is critical that the Veterans providers also know who you are, as the Veterans caregiver, and your relationship to the Veteran. As a Veteran caregiver, you are in the best position to advocate for your Veteran if you have completed the necessary paperwork and releases so that you are assured the right to advocate and be involved in their care. Having the Veteran complete a VA release of information and also VA Advance Directives: Living Will & Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care; will provide the legal authority for the caregiver to support and advocate for their Veteran loved one in their healthcare particularly in the event the Veteran is unable to advocate for themselves.

Next, let us examine the need for ongoing support. Whether you are a LGBT caregiver or not, caregivers require ongoing support in order to maintain their own health. Many LGBT individuals, as a result of loss of connection with family of origin, build strong social networks or "families of choice". With the challenges of coming out, many of you have developed strong networks of support amongst friends, partners, ex partners, neighbors and others to compensate. Continuing to invest in developing these networks of support is a critical investment in your welfare. Bonds built by families of choice during times of adversity can make for deep and abiding connections. These connections like gold should be honored and protected.

While family of origin support may have been damaged or compromised, it may also have been deepened by adversity. Navigating the turmoil of coming out to family may have provided an opportunity to develop a more honest and resilient bond. Some family bonds may grow as a result of disclosing LGBT status and in this respect may provide a more stable connection to rely on. Further, it may have offered you the opportunity, and experience of developing the skills of standing your ground and advocating for what is best for you. This skill can serve you well when you negotiate honestly and directly with family now.

Family support and family of choice supports can provide a significant buffer from the strain of lone caregiving. Certainly aging and illness can have an impact on the ties



of connection that provide the friendship, comfort and nurturing support that we all need to age well. Therefore continuing to build upon and nurture supportive connections will provide insurance against isolation and support your ongoing resilience.

How have you developed your network of support? Who comprises your network? Who do you turn to when you need a break? Who do you look to for comfort and nurturing? Have you developed resilience in seeking out and developing networks to support you? Have you put these resilient skills to use?

Enhancing your network of support may take some creativity and some effort; however, the effort will pay off. Reach out to family and friends. Make a phone call, send an email, and connect via social media. Reach out to your community LGBT organizations and connect with the events and activities where LGBT people congregate. Check out your local or online LGBT newspapers and magazines to follow what is happening in your area. Seek out spiritual leaders and communities that are inclusive of LGBT individuals. Take advantage of online or virtual communities where you can connect with those that have a shared interest. Connect with the VA Caregiver Support Line, as we are available to listen and support you in your efforts. Support in whatever form, fuels your resilience, restores your balance, and fires your desire for living, so keep connected.

Recognition of your most powerful source of support, your spouse, came on June 26, 2015 with the Supreme Court Ruling recognizing marriage between same sex partners. This ruling has had far-reaching implications for LGBT couples including Veterans and military service members. Same sex married couples now qualify for the federal benefits only previously available to heterosexual married couples. There are over one thousand federal laws, that provide rights, protections and benefits, in which marriage is a factor. These laws award rights, benefits, and protections related to social security, survivor benefits, income tax, inheritance and estate benefits, health benefits, and retirement benefits.

This landmark decision has a profound and positive impact particularly for LGBT Veterans and their same sex spouses who are also afforded the Veteran benefits previously denied them. The VA has lifted restrictions to include same sex married couples with regard to; Veteran pensions, home loans backed by the VA, rights to burial, survivors and Veteran group life insurance, survivor benefits and pensions, G.I. Bill education, and disability compensation for married couples in every state no matter where you were married or currently reside. Make sure that the LGBT Veteran and their



married spouse and children are accessing all of the benefits that the Veterans service entitles.

Married same sex couples across the country are now afforded the benefits provided to all other married couples with regard to federal employment or in federal programs, however, many state marriage laws still stand in the way of many receiving the full measure of benefits. Being aware of the state and federal laws and their impact on same sex spouses can arm you with the information to protect yourself and help you make adjustments accordingly. Clarify; Social Security benefits, tax benefits, such as filing jointly, and estate taxes, to assure that you are aware of the benefits that you are entitled to and afforded under law particularly in the state where you reside. Having access to family medical insurance, long term care benefits, retirement benefits, death benefits, and Family Medical Leave Act benefits can help inform decisions and provide a sense of security and empowerment in your care of the LGBT Veteran and as their caregiver spouse.

There are many benefits and protections at the federal and state level that are changing, and some that remain in limbo. In November of 2010 federal regulations took effect that now require all hospitals that receive Medicare and Medicaid funds (which includes most hospitals), to allow visitation rights of LGBT patients and must ensure that medical decision rights through advance directives of LGBT patients are respected. This regulation stipulates that individuals defined by the patient as family, as opposed to family of origin, be afforded visitation rights.

If the LGBT Veteran is relying on a caregiver who may not be legally recognized, such as a partner or family of choice member, it is critical that you have the legal documents in place to assure that you are not excluded from any decision making in your medical care. Complete the Advance Directives for your state, which describes your wishes for care and includes a medical power of attorney or healthcare proxy. [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org) has a web site that provides direction and forms for your state to complete Advance Directives or you may decide to consult an attorney.

Seek out LGBT affirming service providers in your community. Reach out to friends or contact your local LGBT community center and ask about providers that they have worked with positively in your community. The LGBT Aging Center is a great resource to connect on line at [www.lgbtagingcenter.org](http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org) . If you are looking for home care services, the LGBT Aging center recommends that you contact local HIV/AIDS service providers to inquire which agencies they have worked closely with providing LGBT home care. Look to see who advertises in your LGBT print or online magazine



as often these service providers are LGBT friendly. Not all communities have a local LGBT community center or news so you would then want to connect with the many National LGBT Organizations available on line. The LGBT Aging Center also has an expanding list of resources to assist you, so explore this resource and expand your options for support and care.

Caregiving can be isolating and stressful and certainly being an LGBT caregiver can further contribute to the burdens carried. Given the increased vulnerability and risk for mental health concerns in oppressed minorities, it is especially important that you are able to access mental health and counseling supports that can provide you the assistance you need to maintain your stability, wellbeing and balance in your life.

Fortunately, great strides have been made since the psychiatric community removed homosexuality from the diagnostic manual of disorders 35 years ago. While being LGBT is no longer recognized as a mental health disorder, the contributing stresses experienced by the LGBT community can contribute to increased risk of isolation, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicide. Find a counselor, therapist, or support group where you feel comfortable and accepted. Seeking counseling is just another way you can care for yourself and cope with the many demands that you face.

While LGBT individuals may be vulnerable to mental health struggles, due to the adversity you face, many of you as a result of this adversity, developed tremendous strengths. As LGBT individuals who have faced stigma, rejection, and losses affiliated with discrimination, you may have also learned to become more resilient, developed greater self-acceptance, and forged a more solid sense of who you are.

The skills you develop to face adversity are the same skills that support ongoing resilience. As the saying goes, "what doesn't break you will make you stronger." You have fought to claim who you are and this commitment to yourself is your power. Learning to stand up and risk, in the face of adversity, being honest and true to who you are, takes tremendous courage. Your honesty and courage will continue to contribute to your ability to advocate for your fair and equitable treatment.

Next, health insurance coverage has been another arena in which the LGBT community has encountered discrimination. Studies have shown health disparities due in part to lower rates of health insurance coverage, and the lack of LGBT cultural competency of health care providers. The Affordable Care Act has made progress in this arena, ensuring greater access to stable and affordable health coverage, and guarantees insurance companies no longer discriminate against LGBT individuals, nor



turn someone away due to pre-existing health conditions. Further, this act provides legally married same sex couples equality in financial assistance when purchasing coverage in the Health Insurance marketplace regardless of the state where you live. Securing health insurance is one important step towards caregivers and Veterans investing in their ongoing health.

Also in support of equality in health care, The U.S. Department of Labor published in March of 2015 final rules which expanded federal laws to amend the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to provide benefits to same sex married couples no matter what state the individual resides. FMLA covered employees will now, under qualifying circumstances, be able to take up to 12 or 26 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a spouse or certain other family members suffering from a serious health condition. This change in the law protects your employment and your ability to care for your ill loved ones without risk to your employment. As a caregiver spouse of a seriously ill LGBT Veteran, you are now able to be available to your loved one without fear that your employment will be jeopardized.

While the Supreme Court Ruling on same sex marriage has had a significant positive impact in moving LGBT rights forward, there remain significant gaps in protections for the LGBT community with regard to employment and housing discrimination. In many states, there are no protections against job discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. There are also considerable challenges regarding discrimination in housing. A major national study for example found that 48% of same sex couples face discrimination when applying for senior housing. Thankfully, in January 2012, after a National study of discrimination and equality in housing, the Department of Housing and Urban Development issued a final rule stating its core housing programs are open to all persons regardless of sexual orientation, marital status and gender identity.

Further, many Americans didn't realize up until June 2020 that in many states a boss could find out an employee was gay and the next day legally fire them without any protection for the individual. An executive order signed by President Obama insured that those employed by the federal government or federal contractors, which comprise nearly a quarter of the civilian workforce, are protected. Also notable is nearly 90% of Fortune 500 companies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Rightfully, in June of 2020 the Supreme Court did finally grant protections to LGBTQ people in every state. This law prevents individuals from being fired from their job on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This was a major step forward in affording fair and equitable treatment under the law.



This is another of the positive outcomes from the great efforts underway to address the current gaps in protections in housing and employment. The Equality Act is another such effort, to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include LGBT Americans and would provide federal protections across the board for fairness in; credit, education, employment, housing, financial assistance, jury service and public accommodations and many LGBT advocates are pressing heroically forward to secure these rights nationwide.

It is important you are familiar with the rights and protections that you currently have depending on the state in which you reside while awaiting the national fulfillment of all your due rights as an American citizen.

In order to care for you and your LGBT loved one it is critical that you are clear about your rights and your LGBT loved ones rights so that you can advocate best. It can be very confusing and overwhelming to follow all the different federal and state laws that at times are not in sync. With time and continued efforts, the gaps in state and federal protections will hopefully disappear and protections will be in place across the board. Until that time, use your local LGBT community center, the internet, LGBT legal experts and your LGBT community to clarify and support that your rights are protected.

It is so important that not only you understand your rights, but that you and your Veteran loved one put the legal protections in place to make certain that your rights and your wishes are known. That means making sure that you have completed Advance Directives, Health Care Proxy, Financial Power of Attorney and that you have a Will that spells out your wishes. These documents are a critical piece of protection for any LGBT adult no matter age or health status, as these documents are your insurance that you are the one directing your wishes, while also protecting and providing for your loved ones as well.

Finally, caring for you and your LGBT Veteran loved one requires reaching out and developing connections to those that can support you in your caregiving journey. It means recognizing the very real challenges faced by you and your Veteran loved one. It also means calling on and tapping into the sources of strength that have carried you through the tough times. Caring for you means being able to continue to speak up and stand up for your rights. Seek out support from experts, family of choice, family of origin, faith communities, VA providers, the VA Caregiver Support Line, and the LGBT community, to care, support, and stand with you.





Your LGBT Veteran has fought to preserve the liberty and rights of all Americans. The VA has committed to honoring LGBT Veterans' service by providing benefits and healthcare that respects and protects the LGBT Veteran's rights.

In the words of President Obama during his 2015 Presidential Proclamation to the LGBT community, he states, "All people deserve to live with dignity and respect, free from fear and violence and protected against discrimination regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. We celebrate the proud legacy LGBT individuals have woven into the fabric of our nation, we honor those that have fought to perfect our Union and we continue to work to build a society where every child grows up knowing that their country supports them, is proud of them, and has a place for them exactly as they are."

The Caregiver Support line is here for you and supports you in caring for your LGBT Veteran. We honor your Veteran and your commitment to their care and stand with you in support of your great efforts. Our hope is that you feel free to turn to us for support and that someday the promise of fair and equal rights will be preserved for all.