

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Assist LGBTQ+ Veterans

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**TRENTON** – Today, Governor Phil Murphy signed S2815, which directs the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMAVA) to assist former Armed Forces service members who were denied an honorable discharge due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. DMAVA will assist veterans with completing and submitting the appropriate forms to petition the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to change their discharge designation to instead reflect an honorable discharge. DMAVA will also be tasked with creating, publishing, and distributing material to all public agencies regarding the availability of the assistance, as well as creating a uniform and consistent process for providing such assistance.

"Our LGBTQ+ servicemembers made countless sacrifices to serve this nation, yet were discharged and denied the services and benefits they deserved simply because of who they were and whom they loved," said **Governor Murphy**. "With today's bill signing, we are streamlining the process to provide direct assistance to these brave men and women in their efforts to revise their discharge status and attain the benefits they earned and deserve for their service."

Nearly 100,000 LGBTQ+ servicemembers were denied honorable discharge prior to the repeal of the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. As a result, these servicemembers are ineligible for both state and federal veterans' benefits. Under this legislation, former servicemembers who have the designation of their discharge changed will be eligible for the same rights, privileges, and benefits that are offered to servicemembers who were honorably discharged.

"Members of the LGBTQ+ community who bravely served our country and who were discharged on the basis of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation were done a grievous injustice," said **Senator Vin Gopal**. "This law won't right that wrong completely, but it is a step toward ensuring that former service members are afforded the respect and benefits they deserve." "Over 100,000 LGBTQ+ vets have been shamefully denied the benefits and support they have earned protecting this country, due to discriminatory discharges over their sexual orientation," said **Senator Nia Gill**. "With this law, the DMVA will be tasked with assisting our service members in obtaining the benefits they are entitled to for their service."

"Although our country has made significant strides in equality for LGBTQ Americans, our shameful history of discrimination is still affecting veterans to this day," said **Assemblymembers Joann Downey, Joe Daniels, Eric Houghtaling, and John Armato**. "It is incumbent on us to do everything we can to rectify the injustice many service members have faced for decades. Anyone who was 'dishonorably' discharged solely because of their identity or orientation deserves to have official records indicate an honorable discharge status instead. Not only is it a matter of principle, but it would afford these veterans the same benefits and privileges as their fellow service members. Assistance from DMAVA is how New Jersey can show our support and make it easier for LGBTQ veterans to navigate the process of requesting updated records. It is only right we help them achieve a designation that accurately reflects their honorable service. Anyone who served honorably in defense of our great nation is honorable and must be recognized as such."

"This new law rights a historic wrong and treats all New Jerseyans who have served with dignity and respect," said **Colonel Lisa J. Hou, D.O., Interim Adjutant General and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs**. "The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs employs Veterans Service Officers in each county, and we stand ready to assist LGBTQ Veterans upgrade their discharges."

"I served under the military's ban on gay and lesbian service members, and I know the heartbreak of so many who served with honor only to be pursued and kicked out," said **Sue Fulton, Chief Administrator of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission**. "For those who were dismissed with anything less than an honorable discharge, this restores the dignity of their service. As a practical matter, it also enables them to take advantage of the benefits they rightly earned. This is a proud day for New Jersey military veterans!"

"With the enactment of this legislation, Governor Murphy is once again standing up for the LGBTQ+ community, ensuring that LGBTQ+ people who served our country in uniform can access the benefits they deserve," said **Shawn M. LaTourette, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner-designate and the Immediate Past Chair of the LGBTQ Rights Section of the New Jersey State Bar Association**. "This legislation brings us one step closer to the promise of lived equality for all LGBTQ+ people in the Garden State."

"By signing this law, Governor Murphy ends a great injustice against LGBTQ+ service members," said **David Mixner, LGBTQ+ rights activist**. "The Governor has restored dignity and honor to the thousands who have served and protected America. His actions resonates not only in New Jersey, but around our country. Governor and Ms. Murphy shall forever have a special place in our hearts."

"It is critical that we stand behind and uplift all those who have the courage to serve in our armed forces," said **Christian Fuscarino, Executive Director of Garden State Equality**. "The discriminatory 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy is thankfully a thing of the past, but the impact on those who courageously served—only to have been dishonorably discharged because of who they love—is still very much an issue today. This new bill ensures that every New Jersey veteran, who was ready and willing to fight for the United States and defend our freedoms across the globe, will be assisted in the process of getting the benefits that they are entitled to. As a military spouse, married to a U.S. Marine, I know first-hand how helpful these benefits will be to military families all over our state."

"The brave men and women who put their lives on the line to protect our nation should be provided with the respect and support they deserve when they return home," said **Reed Gusciora, Mayor of Trenton**. "Sadly, for many LGBTQ+ veterans, they were denied benefits and services due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. I want to thank Governor Murphy for addressing this injustice and honoring these veterans."

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