



Ahead of 50th Anniversary of Stonewall Riots, Duckworth & Pappas Introduce Bill to Improve VA Services for LGBT Veterans

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– U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Chris Pappas (NH-01) introduced legislation today to support LGBT Veterans by amending the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) definition of “minority group member” to explicitly include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Veterans. The *LGBT VA Advocacy Inclusion Act* would authorize the VA’s Center for Minority Veterans (CMV), an office in VA’s Central Office, to include these Veterans in their mission. While the CMV has historically been inclusive of all minority Veterans, the Trump Administration and its political appointees have strictly enforced that CMV employees are not authorized to include LGBT Veterans in their advocacy and outreach.

“We owe all Veterans who have defended our Nation access to the healthcare and benefits we promised, and they have rightfully earned – regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. LGBT Veterans face unique challenges and barriers to accessing the care and benefits we promised them, and because of this they are experiencing unacceptable health disparities such as increased mental illness, depression, suicidal ideation, certain cancers and intimate partner violence at far higher rates than other Veterans,” Duckworth said. **“Despite these alarming trends, VA does not currently offer any targeted outreach to LGBT Veterans. That’s why I’m proud to introduce this bill with Congressman Pappas that would help identify these barriers, address gaps in care and give these Veterans a voice within VA’s Central Office.”**

“Although it’s been eight years since the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t tell, LGBTQ veterans continue to face unique barriers to accessing the care and benefits they earned through their service,” said Congressman Pappas, Chair of the Oversight and

Investigations Subcommittee for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. **“All of our nation’s heroes, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, deserve our unwavering support, and I am proud to introduce legislation with Senator Duckworth.”**

CMV was established in 1994 during the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” era with limited authority to serve only “minority group member” Veterans, defined as racial and ethnic minorities – Asian American, Black, Hispanic Native American or Pacific-Islander American. This limited authority has prevented LGBT Veterans from benefitting from CMV’s important work, such as establishing and improving programs within VA for the specific needs of minorities, promoting the use of benefits VA provides with targeted outreach to minorities, disseminating information and serving as a resource center to minority Veterans and analyzing and evaluating complaints made by or on behalf of minority Veterans.

Duckworth has been a strong advocate for the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans, including active servicemembers and Veterans. Earlier this month, Duckworth [delivered a speech](#) honoring LGBTQ+ Servicemembers and condemning the Trump Administration’s transgender military ban (which she has repeatedly [spoken out against](#)) at DoD Pride’s eighth annual Pride Month event. She also recently [questioned](#) the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) officials on DOD’s decision to not report data on rates of assault against LGBTQ servicemembers despite prior years’ reports showing higher-than-average assault rates at a roundtable in May.

U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Ed Markey (D-MA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) are co-sponsoring this legislation. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) support this legislation.