

## **Nontheist Military Member Organization Calls for Open Service for the US Military**

Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) is an antiquated policy that must be replaced by open service for all service members regardless of sexual orientation. DADT hurts the military by forcing honorable service members to either hide their personal life or be removed from service. After decades of hand-wringing about the impact open service may have on combat power, senior military leaders and respected veterans confirm that the military is ready to choose integrity over discrimination. Despite recent political backpedaling, leaders including Admiral Mike Mullen, Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili, and Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen see shifts in public opinion and a maturation of the military that now allow the military to reject old prejudices and allow all to serve openly.

Opponents of open service for all are now limited almost exclusively to religious advocacy organizations using sectarian arguments. Two Christian special-rights advocacy groups have submitted a letter from former chaplains painting DADT as an issue of religious liberty. They fear their opposition to homosexuality will be labeled as "rank bigotry comparable to racism." They fear they will not be able to label homosexuality as "sinful and harmful" and that they will not be able to avoid working with homosexual service members. They fear that in federally-funded, privileged, and supposedly secular family support programs such as Strong Bonds, chaplains will not be able to evangelize their faith.

MAAF affirms that all of these are likely outcomes of open service for gay and lesbian service members. MAAF wholeheartedly supports these restrictions on the opportunity to discriminate and advises chaplains who have a concern to seek counsel from of 29 faith groups including the Interfaith Alliance and Knights Out who can guide chaplains to a scripture-based tolerance of homosexuality. This personal / professional separation in military duties is the same skill that allows chaplains to minister daily to a military society that is pluralistic in belief and action.

MAAF hopes that by next Memorial Day, we find a military moving forward into a stronger, larger, more cohesive, and healthier fighting force. Our military deserves to support integrity for all and a team that is built upon American values and combat power without sectarian division. We call upon military and civilian leaders to repeal DADT and support open service for all with regulation, military legislation, and vocal support at the line level.

The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers an independent 501(c)3 project of Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs. MAAF is a community support network that connects military members from around the world with each other and with local organizations. Where necessary, MAAF identifies, examines, and responds to insensitive practices that illegally promote religion within the military. MAAF supports Constitutional State-Church Separation and 1st Amendment rights for all service members.

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