



TO: Sub-committee on Transportation and Economic Development
FR: Jeana Frazzini, Co-Executive Director, Basic Rights Oregon
DA: June 9, 2015
RE: Support for SB 946

Co-Chair Johnson and Co-Chair Gomberg, and members of the Committee, my name is Jeana Frazzini and I am the Co-Executive Director of Basic Rights Oregon, our state's leading advocacy group working to ensure that all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Oregonians experience equality.

In 2010, Basic Rights Oregon celebrated then Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen for calling for an end to the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy. This policy was discriminatory and shameful, and we were glad to see it abolished.

We are grateful for the United States' open service policy that allows all individuals to serve their country, with less fear for being targeted because of who they love. However, Oregon still has veterans that are unable to access benefits to which they would otherwise be entitled because they were dismissed from the military because of their sexual orientation under old policies. While some of these individuals were dismissed under Don't Ask Don't Tell, others were dismissed stretching all the way back to World War II. When these dismissals classified as "dishonorable" or "other than honorable", it excluded individuals from state and federal benefits.

We believe Oregon should start to address this issue by creating a position that can support veterans in navigating a very cumbersome and challenging process to apply to change their status or to access benefits they might believe they are excluded from. SB 946 would create a needed position, called the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Coordinator that would be created within the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

LGBT veterans who were discharged because of their sexual orientation can get their discharge status upgraded-- but many do not know this-- an LGBT coordinator can help them. It would serve a needed role of conducting outreach, education, and assistance in navigating a process where expertise and specific knowledge and time is needed.

We are very glad Senator Gelser was able to work with ODVA to draft this position to ensure they have the resources to provide outreach to our community.

SB 946 gives Oregon the chance to lead the country in honoring the work and sacrifice of all veterans. Please pass SB 946 so that all of our veterans can access the benefits and services available to all Oregon service members. At Basic Rights Oregon, we believe that all LGBT veterans should get the recognition and equal treatment they deserve. We urge you to pass this important legislation.