



ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATURE
HAROLD L. JOYCE ALBANY COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
112 STATE STREET RM. 710
ALBANY, NY 12207

ANDREW JOYCE
ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATOR, 9TH DISTRICT

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, CIVIC CENTER COMMITTEE
MEMBER, PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
MEMBER, SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

CONTACT:
518-858-2090
ANDREWJOYCE@GMAIL.COM

Albany County Restoration of Honor Act Would Bestow Veteran's Benefits to LGBT Veterans Discharged During the Don't Ask Don't Tell Era

While similar legislation has stalled nationwide and statewide, Albany County is poised to lead the way in the fight for equality for the LGBT Veterans who have sacrificed so much on our behalf

Albany, NY – On Veteran's Day 2016, Albany County Legislators Andrew Joyce, Lynne Lekakis, Bryan Clenahan, Raymond Joyce, Allison McLean Lane, Gary Domalewicz, Christopher Higgins, Douglas Bullock and Joanne Cunningham have introduced a measure that would outline a process for any Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Veteran who was discharged under Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) to receive Albany County-level Veteran's Benefits. These benefits include property tax exemption, civil service points and the opportunity to participate in the County's Return the Favor Program.

"I've served side-by-side with LGBT Veterans in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and even Staten Island during Superstorm Sandy" said Andrew Joyce, the bill's lead sponsor. "We've come a long way in our society towards equality, and it's time our policies reflected that."

An estimated 114,000 service members have been discharged because of their sexual orientation or gender identity since World War II, leaving many with tarnished military records and reputations that have unfairly jeopardized their ability to access jobs, scholarships, and vital services. The sponsors of this bill agree that while we wait for Washington, D.C. and the State Legislature to act, it is once incumbent upon Albany County to lead the way.

This legislation will ensure that veterans whose discharged under DADT were less than honorable due solely to their sexual orientation or gender identity are not impeded from receiving County benefits for which they would otherwise be eligible. Any LGBT Veteran who was other-than-honorably discharged from the military are encouraged to provide, in writing, the details surrounding the nature of their discharge, in addition to their DD-214 to the staff at the Albany County Veteran's Services Bureau. The Bureau would review their case, and based off the information provided, would make a determination on their eligibility.

"The DADT policy was sanctioned discrimination" said Legislator Allison McLean-Lane (D-Menands). "They have fought to preserve our freedoms, including freedom from discrimination. Now, we are obligated to fight for them. I'd like to thank Andrew Joyce for introducing this important legislation, and for his service to our country."

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