

# Retired Generals: Don't Delay Accepting Trans Troops



Their statement comes amid reports that Defense Secretary James Mattis might put a hold on bringing in transgender recruits.

June 08 2017 3:08 PM EDT

Reports indicate that Secretary of Defense James Mattis may indefinitely delay accepting transgender recruits into the armed forces — but three retired generals are publicly opposing any delay.

“Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has stated that he will make personnel decisions based on evidence about what best promotes force readiness,” Army Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, retired Army Major Gen. Gale Pollock, and retired Army Brig. Gen. Clara Adams-Ender (pictured, from left) said in a statement released Wednesday to [The Hill](#) through the Palm Center, a think tank on LGBT issues in the military.

“If he is serious about that commitment, he will maintain existing policy and make clear that there will be no return to the days of forcing capable applicants to lie in order to serve their country,” they continued.

Ash Carter, Defense secretary under President Obama, [lifted the ban on trans troops](#) a year ago; unlike the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for lesbian, gay, and bisexual troops, it was a matter of Defense Department regulation, not a law passed by Congress, so it could be changed at the department’s discretion. There were, of course, already transgender people in the military, so the lifting of the ban meant they could serve openly. But Carter delayed the acceptance of new trans recruits until July 1 of this year, allowing for a year to implement the new policy.

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work sent leaders of each military branch a memo in May asking them to forward their plans for implementation. But then some top officers, particularly in the Army and the Marines, began expressing reservations about the policy and urging a delay.

Work’s memo offered “a sliver of wiggle room” to those who might oppose accepting trans troops, [The Hill](#) reports. “The personnel policies of this department are designed to enhance the warfighting readiness and lethality of the force that protects our country,” Work wrote. “We do not intend to reconsider prior decisions unless they cause readiness problems that could lessen our ability to fight, survive and win on the battlefield.” The key words

here were “readiness problems.”

But there’s no reason to think trans troops would cause such problems, the generals said. “Military and political leaders insisted that lifting DADT would undermine cohesion, recruitment and retention, but none of these concerns were borne out and the change was uniformly hailed for improving readiness,” they wrote. “Similar fears were recycled about inclusive policy for transgender troops, but yet again, the fears turned out to be wholly unfounded.” Studies have shown no medical rationale for the trans ban and no significant effect on readiness if trans people are allowed to serve, they noted.

It’s “sad” to have to fight over trans troops when the issue appeared to be settled, Palm Center director Aaron Belkin told *The Hill* last week, when reports of a possible delay began circulating.

“What’s so sad about hearing these arguments is that Secretary Mattis and the Pentagon have seemed like the one place in the executive branch where honesty and evidence-based policy and adult decision-making are still the name of the game,” Belkin said.