

Retired generals to Mattis: Don't delay accepting transgender recruits

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A trio of retired generals is urging Defense Secretary James Mattis not to delay accepting transgender recruits into the military after reports that the Pentagon chief was considering such a move.

“Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has stated that he will make personnel decisions based on evidence about what best promotes force readiness,” retired Army Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, retired Army Major Gen. Gale Pollock and retired Army Brig. Gen. Clara Adams-Ender wrote in a statement provided to The Hill.

“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 said.

Transgender troops already in the military have been able to serve openly since then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter lifted the ban in June 2016. But under the policy Carter crafted, transgender recruits haven’t been allowed to enlist pending the end of a one-year implementation period.

That day arrives July 1 under the timeline set under Carter, but reports [emerged last week](#) indicating that Mattis might indefinitely delay a decision. In early May, Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work sent a memo calling for the services to submit their plans for accepting transgender recruits by July 1. The memo said there’s no intention of changing the policy “unless they cause readiness problems that could lessen our ability to fight, survive and win on the battlefield.”

On the heels of the memo, senior leaders in the military, particularly the Army and Marines, have reportedly been voicing concerns about the policy and asking for a delay in its implementation.

In their Wednesday statement, the retired generals likened not accepting transgender recruits to a return to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the repealed ban on gay troops serving openly.

“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 in the statement that was provided by the Palm Center, an independent think tank.

“Similar fears were recycled about inclusive policy for transgender troops, but yet again, the fears turned out to be wholly unfounded.”

The officers cited a slew of studies as well as news stories with high praise from commanders for transgender troops.

The group pointed to a 2014 commission of retired officers and a former surgeon general that concluded that “there is no compelling medical reason for the ban” on transgender troops in findings published in peer-reviewed journal “Armed Forces and Society.”

Also, a RAND Corp. study commissioned by the Pentagon last year, as it prepared to lift the ban, said that researchers “estimate the impact on readiness to be negligible” with “no significant effect on cohesion, operational effectiveness or readiness.”