



For Immediate Release

March 31, 2022

New York State Division of Veterans' Services Honors Transgender Day of Visibility

***Hosts Program Highlighting Military Service of Veterans who
Identify as Transgender***

***Adds 'Gender X' Option in Client Management System to
Implement Gender Recognition Act***

New York State's Division of Veterans' Services will commemorate the International Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31 with a program believed to be the largest event in the Division's history honoring the multiple contributions to our nation's military from Veterans who identify as transgender.

Speakers at this program will represent multiple branches and eras of military service, offering event attendees a robust picture of the achievements of Veterans who are transgender, the challenges and cultural biases that these Veterans confronted while serving in the military, and the evolution of the military and societal viewpoints concerning the service of individuals who identify as transgender. The panelists will include leaders from Minority Veterans of America, SAGEVets, and Gender Equality New York, as well as Jenna Frasier, the Edie Windsor, Marsha P. Johnson, and Sylvia Rivera LGBTQ Fellow of the Office of Governor Kathy Hochul.

This online gathering, titled "Invisible No More," coincides with the Division's recent update of its client management system to include a "Gender X" gender identity option, ensuring that the Division serves all clients with dignity and in recognition of their

authentic identity. The client management system update is part of a statewide effort focusing on improving gender inclusivity brought about by Governor Hochul's State of the State initiative to implement the Gender Recognition Act.

"The International Transgender Day of Visibility calls our attention to those Veterans, Service Members, and Military Family members who have been invisible to too much of society for far too long," **said Division of Veterans' Services Director Rev. Viviana DeCohen.** "Individuals who are transgender have served in our nation's military with honor and distinction. They deserve the thanks of our state and nation, and they deserve to exercise the fundamental human right of being able to serve our country with their authentic identity recognized. Updating our client management system with the 'Gender X' option, and hosting this special 'Invisible No More' gathering, is the very least that we can do to celebrate the service of these courageous individuals."

"All of us at New York State Division of Veterans' Services are committed to serving Veterans who identify as transgender and other gender minorities with dignity and respect," **said Division of Veterans' Services Deputy Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Kristen L. Rouse.** "We are proud to take part in the effort led by Governor Hochul to ensure that we offer the veterans we serve the option to select 'Gender X' to reflect their gender identification. This is one small step we have made to ensure Veterans are not forced to hide their authentic selves while accessing the benefits and services they have earned through their military service. We encourage all those serving Veterans to take similar actions."

Since November 2020, the Division of Veterans' Services has also served Veterans who are transgender through the Restoration of Honor Act, a state statute that permits the Division to restore access to New York State Veterans' benefits for Veterans who wrongfully received a less-than-honorable administrative discharge based on their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, or based on a service-related mental health condition. The Division has already granted favorable decisions in 35 Restoration of Honor Act applications and looks forward to receiving more.

In 2009, transgender activist Rachel Crandall of Michigan founded International Transgender Day of Visibility to celebrate individuals who identify as transgender and to raise awareness of the discrimination that individuals who identify as transgender face worldwide. Today, millions of people around the world recognize March 31 as a day of celebration, honor, and recognition for individuals who are transgender.

Estimates show that as many as 15,000 transgender individuals are currently serving in the United States military. Despite a history of national policies that prevented individuals who are transgender from serving openly, a study in 2015 demonstrated that people who are transgender are two times more likely than members of the general population in the United States to serve in the military.

Last year, on the International Transgender Day of Visibility, President Biden's administration issued an executive order overturning the prior administration's policies that forced Service Members out of the military based on gender identity. President Biden's executive order, which marks its one-year anniversary of effectiveness today, prohibits discrimination in military service based on gender identity and calls for a re-examination of the Service Members who were involuntarily discharged or denied re-enlistment under the previous administration's policy.

New York State's Division of Veterans' Services, which has served as the state's advocacy agency for Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families since 1945, maintains an agency-wide commitment of serving all Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families in a wide range of practice areas, including claims and appeals for benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, discharge upgrade appeals to the United States Department of Defense, and claims for New York State benefits. Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families are encouraged to contact the Division at 1-888-838-7697 or www.veterans.ny.gov to meet — in-person or [virtually](#) — with an accredited Veterans Benefits Advisor to address their needs and gain the full measure of benefits that they have earned.

-- ### --