NEW YORK STATE | Department of Veterans' Services

NEWS FROM THE NYS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES

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New York State Department of Veterans' Services to Host 2025 Human Rights Conference at Fordham Law School on June 25

Focus on "Double Consciousness" in the Veteran Experience Reflects a Timely National Conversation on Rights and Recognition

NEW YORK, NY — In a time when the national dialogue around civil liberties and inclusion is evolving in profound and often polarizing ways, the New York State Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is proud to announce its 2025 Human Rights Conference on **Wednesday, June 25, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, at Fordham University Law School, Costantino Hall, 150 West 62nd Street, New York, NY.**

Themed ***Veils to Vision: Navigating Double Consciousness in the Veteran Experience***, the conference will take an honest look at the complex intersections of identity, service, and social justice through the lens of Veterans from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. The unique challenges and opportunities of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion for Veterans will be discussed during expert panels.

"In an era where rights once considered secure are now being questioned, our conference serves as both a mirror and a megaphone," **said DVS Commissioner Viviana M. DeCohen**. "It reflects what many Veterans face and amplifies our responsibility as a state to continue standing strong for the dignity, safety, and humanity of every person who has worn the uniform."

At a time when national policies increasingly marginalize communities that have long served in silence, the conference reaffirms New York's commitment to equity, truth, and representation. The conference is part of DVS's mission to ensure that New York's Veterans and Military Families receive not only the benefits they have earned but experience a genuine sense of belonging and justice in their daily lives.

DVS Deputy Counsel Benjamin Pomerance noted, "This conference is about truth-telling and listening to Veterans who have carried the burdens of service, identity, and invisibility. It is also about shaping responsive public policies that ensure New York's Veterans continue to be seen, heard, and supported."

The featured topic, "double consciousness" – a term introduced by scholar W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* describing the internal conflict experienced by subordinated or marginalized groups in the eyes of a dominant society – will anchor essential discussions around race, identity, service, as well as personal and societal perceptions.

Dr. Lessie Branch, DVS Special Assistant for Community Engagement, emphasized the conference's timeliness and urgency when the national scaffolding of equity feels shaken. "Our conference does not simply respond to the moment: it will meet it with authentic voices of clarity, courage, and care with an emphasis on listening, empathy, and fostering community."

The event is free to attend and open to the public, but registration is required in advance. Attendees can register at **https://tinyurl.com/yncud4nt**.

Among the scheduled sessions at the DVS June 25 Human Rights conference are:

- Panel 1: Expanding the Lens: Urgent and Contested Veteran Policy Issues in Today's Political Climate – As the national discourse around Veterans' rights and military policies becomes increasingly complex, several pressing issues demand attention. Legislative changes, shifting advocacy efforts, and broader political debates are shaping the experiences of those who have served. This panel will explore the most urgent and contested aspects of Veteran policy today, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and that real solutions are pursued;

- Special Presentation by the New York State Division of Human Rights, Honoring the Legacy of James Zappalorti – Presentation honoring Mr. Zappalorti's service and legacy, along with a focus on how the anti-hate crime legislation that arose after he was killed — laws that continue to protect New Yorkers and bring wrongdoers to justice today. Presenters: Ron Zacchi, Senior Director, Hate and Bias Prevention Unit, New York State Division of Human Rights, and Ricardo Aguirre, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, New York State Division of Human Rights;

- Panel 2: Responding to New Federal Policies Directed at Veterans of the LGBTQIA+ Community, The New York Way – Recent policy shifts at the federal level have both expanded and threatened protections for LGBTQIA+ Veterans. While some progress has been made in addressing historical injustices – such as discharge upgrades for those expelled under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" – new legal and legislative challenges threaten healthcare access, service eligibility, and protections against discrimination. Advocacy efforts are crucial to safeguarding gains and ensuring that LGBTQIA+ Veterans receive equitable treatment within the VA and beyond; and

- Panel 3: Building and Sustaining Allyship for Veterans and Military Families in Tumultuous Times – With increasing political polarization, Veterans are often used as symbols in national debates rather than as active participants in shaping policies that affect them. Meanwhile, military families face economic uncertainty, benefits reductions, and challenges navigating shifting policies on education, housing, and employment. The role of allies—whether in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors—has never been more crucial. Coalition-building and bipartisan advocacy efforts are essential to ensuring that Veteran-centered policies remain a national priority, regardless of the political climate.

The conference will conclude with a call to action and reflection on how New York continues to lead the nation in honoring and advancing the human rights and dignity of all its Veterans.

Read the official published release here:
https://www.einpresswire.com/article/820503247/new-york-state-department-of-veterans-services-to-host-2025-human-rights-conference-at-fordham-law-school-on-june-25.

About the NYS Department of Veterans' Services

The New York State Department of Veterans' Services proudly serves New York's Veterans, Service Members, and Military Families, connecting them with benefits, services, and support. All who served should contact the Department at 888-838-7697 or via its website – veterans.ny.gov – to meet in-person or virtually with an accredited Veterans Benefits Advisor to receive the benefits they have earned. Follow DVS on Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn.

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