



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

October 1, 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin
269 Russell Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Levin:

On behalf of the 150,000 members of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing to thank you for your leadership in convening the upcoming hearing concerning the repeal of the current “Policy concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces” (10 U.S.C. § 654, also referred to as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”).

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world’s largest association of psychologists. Comprising researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, a profession, and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

Our association has a long-standing relationship and commitment to the U.S. military in their efforts to support national security and the well-being of military service members. APA is also committed to working in society generally to oppose prejudice and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The U.S. military “homosexual conduct” policy, as mandated by 10 U.S.C. § 654, harms the effectiveness of the U.S. military and the well-being of gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members.

APA’s policy initiatives are based on sound scientific research. APA members have produced a large body of research to further understand the psychological experience of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender populations. Studies have found these individuals to be as psychologically healthy as their heterosexual counterparts. Much research has compared lesbians and gay men to heterosexuals with the consistent finding that both groups score in the normal range on psychological tests. As a result of these findings, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed “homosexuality” from the diagnostic manual of mental disorders. Soon thereafter, our association passed a resolution supporting this position.

The rationale for the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, as stated in its legislative text, is that the presence of gay, lesbian or bisexual service members in the military would pose an unacceptable risk to the development of unit cohesion (strong bonds of trust based on social similarity and shared interests) and other social benefits. Unit cohesion, in turn, is emphasized in the policy as one of the main predictors for combat effectiveness,

leading to successful military operations. However, scientific research has shown that instead of unit cohesion, the critical predictor for a unit's military success is task cohesion (a joint commitment to completing the task at hand). Task cohesion does not depend on whether or not all team members share the same sexual orientation.

Furthermore, research has consistently found that heterosexuals who have contact with LGBT populations have more positive attitudes towards LGBT people as a group. Taken together, these findings suggest that the presence of gay, lesbian, or bisexual service members does not undermine morale or relationships in the military, but rather may strengthen rapport between military personnel.

This stance is reflected in APA's policy statement on *Sexual Orientation and Military Service* (enclosed for your consideration). In this policy statement, APA reaffirmed its commitment to disseminating scientific knowledge to remove the stigma of mental disorders associated with gay, lesbian, and bisexual behavior and orientations. At the same time, the policy statement articulates APA's support for efforts that foster physical and mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual service members, as well as the military and our nation as a whole.

I strongly urge your support for, the *Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2009*, when this legislation is introduced in the Senate. Specifically, this important proposal would permanently eliminate sexual discrimination in the military, and institute a policy of equal treatment for all service members, independent of their sexual orientation. It would also make an important contribution to the health and welfare of gay, lesbian, and bisexual military personnel, and to the effectiveness of the U.S. military in general.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to working with you to secure passage of this vital legislation during the 111th Congress. Please contact Jutta Tobias, Ph.D., of our Government Relations Office at (202) 336-5668 or jtobias@apa.org, if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Public Interest Directorate

Cc: The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand