

# Haynes Boone Litigation Attorney Helps Secure Historic Settlement for LGBTQ+ Veterans

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January 6, 2025 Chelsea Corey

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**PRACTICES** Litigation

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A group of LGBTQ+ veterans discharged under the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ("DADT") policy and similar earlier policies have reached a historic settlement agreement in their class action lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Defense.

Although lawmakers repealed DADT more than a decade ago, veterans have continued to face discrimination through the violation of their constitutional rights to privacy, due process and equal protection. This proposed settlement, which is subject to court approval, is a step forward in simplifying the complicated and challenging process veterans face in seeking discharge upgrades and the removal of sexual orientation indicators on their discharge papers. It would also potentially allow thousands of service members to gain access to benefits they have earned but were previously denied.

Haynes Boone Litigation Partner [Chelsea Corey](#) played a key role in securing this landmark settlement as part of a coalition of law firms and legal organizations. The firm's involvement reflects its longstanding commitment to pro bono work and advancing civil rights.

Under the terms of the agreement, class members would have the opportunity, as early as summer 2025, to request changes to their discharge papers as well as an upgrade to Honorable Discharge status. This proposed settlement will alleviate the immense challenges faced by LGBTQ+ veterans in seeking corrections to their discharge records, ameliorating the current process, which is convoluted, burdensome, and often fraught with re-traumatization and stigma. This agreement represents a meaningful step toward restoring their honor and providing long-overdue recognition for their service to the nation.

"We are proud to announce an important proposed settlement that brings justice to more than 30,000 LGBTQ+ veterans who were unfairly discharged under discriminatory policies," Corey said. "This proposed settlement would implement a powerful two-pronged relief process that allows veterans a chance to update their discharge records to remove discriminatory indicators or, for many, an opportunity to have their discharges upgraded. These veterans deserve our honor and respect and finally their discharge paperwork can reflect that honor."

The class action lawsuit, filed on Aug. 8, 2023, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, sought the removal of discriminatory narratives and separation codes that disclosed the veterans' actual or perceived sexual orientation and, for certain veterans, the upgrade of discharge statuses. Prior to 2011, under DADT and its predecessor policies, service members were discharged for their actual or perceived sexual orientation, including many who received discharge characterizations that were less than Honorable.

## Settlement Terms

The first prong of the proposed settlement streamlines the process for veterans who already have Honorable or Uncharacterized/Entry Level discharges to request an administrative change to their DD-214 forms. This change will remove discriminatory sexual orientation indicators and update reenlistment codes from RE-4 to RE-1 without having to go through a formal Board of Corrections process. With more than 18,000 veterans eligible for this adjustment, the new process will make it easier and faster for these veterans to correct their records. Under the Department of Defense's current process, veterans previously faced waits of over a year to obtain this adjustment.

The second prong expands a recent Department of Defense initiative to review the cases of veterans with "Other Than Honorable" or "General Under Honorable" discharge characterizations for potential upgrades. This new process allows veterans to opt in to a group review process without having to complete an entire application or wait to receive their military records. This will simplify and expedite the process, offering veterans a clear pathway to remove discriminatory sexual orientation indicators from their discharge papers, update reenlistment codes from RE-4 to RE-1, and seek an upgrade to an Honorable discharge.

The Plaintiffs who brought this action on behalf of the class of more than 30,000 veterans are Sherrill Farrell, James Gonzales, Jules Sohn, Lilly Steffanides, Hayden Powell and Steven Eglund.

## Plaintiff Statements

"Coming from a family with a long history of military service, I was beyond proud to enlist in 1985 to contribute to my country." said **Sherrill Farrell (she/her), U.S. Navy veteran**. "When I was discharged because of my sexual orientation, I felt that my country was telling me that my service was not valuable – that I was "less than" because of who I loved. Today, I am once again proud to have served my country by standing up for veterans like myself, and ensuring our honor is recognized."

"Growing up, I learned the value of service from my parents and I knew I wanted to serve the public, both in the military and beyond," said **Jules Sohn (she/they), U.S. Marine Corps veteran**. "As a Marine, I was proud to stand alongside my fellow service members, embracing the core values of honor, courage, and commitment. However, the pain and injustice of being discharged under discriminatory policies like 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' have lingered for years. This settlement represents not just a recognition of those wrongs but a step toward ensuring that no service member ever faces such prejudice again."

"My family has always valued service and sacrifice, and I was proud to follow in the footsteps of generations before me by enlisting in the U.S. Navy," said **Lilly Steffanides (they/them), U.S. Navy veteran**. "When I joined in 1988, I was determined to serve my country with honor. However, the discriminatory policies of the time led to my unjust discharge, stripping me of my dignity and access to the benefits I earned. This settlement is not just about correcting records; it's about restoring the honor and pride that LGBTQ+ veterans have always deserved but were denied. I hope this brings justice to others who served with courage, only to face exclusion and discrimination."

Corey and Haynes Boone joined attorneys at the [Impact Fund](#), which support social justice through litigation, [Legal Aid at Work](#), which advocates for workplace rights, and King & Spalding.

For more information, visit the [Justice for LGBTQ+ Veterans website](#).