



SAGEVets Newsletter

sage | Advocacy &
Services for
LGBT Elders
We refuse to be invisible™

Spring 2021

Dear SAGE Veterans and Friends:

The SAGEVets program had a strong start to 2021, due in part to the hard work that has gone into promoting the [New York State Restoration of Honor Act](#) (ROH). SAGEVets saw its first meritorious ROH application awarded to a 63-year-old Black cisgender gay male veteran of the U.S. Navy. We currently have three similar cases in the works. New York State has adopted model legislation for the country with several states now in the process of working on comparable policy. SAGEVets received an invitation to discuss how the ROH helps older LGBT veterans in an interview with [WSHU](#), a nationwide collaboration of NPR-affiliated reporters (more below). In addition, as the only program in the Northeast dedicated to older LGBT veterans, SAGEVets was invited to become a member of the Delaware Valley Veterans Consortium to talk about the ROH. SAGEVets looks forward to collaborating with the DVVC for the upcoming Town Hall meeting with the Philadelphia VA and Kristin Beck (more in the Upcoming Events section).

UPCOMING EVENTS

SAGEVets continues to engage older LGBT veterans by offering and participating in virtual programming. We have several exciting events coming up. We would love to have you join us! If you would kindly help us spread the word to your networks by sharing these links. And please let us know if we can answer any questions by emailing us at:

alewis@sageusa.org

- Memorial Day event, [Finding Access to Veteran Benefits and Healthcare during COVID-19](#). 5/27/21 6pm-7:30pm.
- Delaware Valley Veterans Consortium Town Hall – [LGBTQ Issues in the Veteran Space: A Discussion with Subject Matter Experts](#). Keynote speaker [Kristin Beck](#). 6/2/21 3pm-4:30pm.
- [Intrepid Book Club](#) - honoring Pride by reading the groundbreaking classic, *Coming Out Under Fire* by Alan Bérubé. 6/22/21 5pm-7pm.

SAGEVets is grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with our partners. In March, SAGEVets presented our [Women's History Month program](#) with the National Association of Black Military Women and the

Talk with our Panel of Experts about Finding Access to Veteran Benefits and Healthcare during COVID-19



Thursday, May 27
6pm-7:30pm
More in Upcoming Events Section

NYC HEALTH+ HOSPITALS | NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Division of Veterans' Services | **sageVets** | VOLUNTEERS OF LEGAL SERVICE

New York State Division of Veterans' Services (more below). We hosted [Avoiding Coronavirus Scams: Tips from the FTC](#). We also participated on a panel with Long Island Cares, Inc. and gave a presentation to NYC Senior Helpers. Our partners at the NYC Department of Veterans Services recently launched the first-ever citywide survey of our veteran population. Data collected from this comprehensive survey will help provide better services and care to our veteran community and build a more veteran-friendly ecosystem throughout the City of New York. Please help us by completing the survey and sharing with your networks: nyc.gov/vetsurvey.

We have some exciting virtual programs coming up, so please take a look at the Upcoming Events column. SAGEVets is excited to be presenting with Kristin Beck and the VA on June 2nd to bring the topic of LGBT veteran issues to the Delaware Valley. On May 27th we will partner with experts on veteran benefits and health care to hear how to navigate these services post-pandemic.

Stay strong and battle on,
Ashton Stewart, SAGEVets Program Manager

Please take a moment to complete a quick survey about this newsletter. We would love to hear from you:
<http://sageusa.org/sagevets-survey>

SAGEVets News & Updates:

The Restoration of Honor Act (ROH) in New York State continues to gain momentum locally and beyond. Earlier this month, SAGEVets coordinated several participant interviews with [WSHU](#) Journalist Desiree D'Iorio for an article about various state efforts to expand benefits to veterans discharged for being LGBT, with New York State continuing to inspire state legislatures across the nation. On Feb. 19, Governor Jared Polis signed Colorado's [SB21-026](#), becoming the third state with legislation similar to New York's ROH; former Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo signed [H554](#) in November 2019. N.Y. Assemblymember Barrett's office connected SAGEVets to Illinois State Representative [Joyce Mason](#), who is developing similar legislation for her state. In California, Swords to Plowshares are working diligently with their state legislatures on a similar bill, [AB 325](#). In New Jersey, [NJ S2020](#) was referred to the Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee last month. Connecticut is also working on passing a similar bill, [S.B. No. 788](#) following a public hearing on the topic earlier this year. In addition, Ashton promoted New York's ROH at an Apr. 16 virtual quarterly meetings of the [Delaware Valley Veterans Consortium](#) – representing parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware.

The ROH also seems to have caught the attention of the [V.A., who described the discharge applications process](#) as giving strong consideration to OTH discharges connected to categories covered by the NYS bill: sexual orientation and gender identity, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, and PTSD. This campaign is intended to eventually lead to the implementation of the federal equivalent of the ROH, known as the [Restore Honor to Service Members Act](#). SAGEVets is proud to have had our first meritorious ROH application with several other applications in the works, thanks in part to our legal partners at Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLP, and the Feerick Center Veterans' Rights Project.

Newsletter Notes: Pushing for Policies that Improve the Experiences of Older LGBT Vets

SAGE is collaborating with [Freedom for All Americans](#) on a letter-writing campaign to Congress that shows veterans supporting LGBT non-discrimination protections. Please participate in this vital initiative by [signing the letter](#) telling Congress to update our federal laws to provide comprehensive protections for all LGBT Americans, including veterans and active duty service members.

In NYS, please urge your legislators to support two critical bills that bolster the Restoration of Honor Act. The Pension Buy-Back bill, [A9640/S8280](#). Currently, the pension buy-back program for retired state workers is not offered to eligible applicants under the ROH. Bill A9640/S8280 will change that! The second bill is Assembly Bill [A2014/S448](#), which expands the requirement to disclose cases of military sexual trauma to a VA doctor, or any licensed health care provider in New York State. We thank the New York State Council of Veterans Organization for their leadership in garnering support for this and other important veteran legislation.



SAGEVets Arrives in Central New York

SAGEVets is proud to partner with our SAGE affiliate, SAGE Upstate. Through this collaboration, we are able to connect with older LGBT veterans and veteran service providers in the Central New York region. SAGE Upstate forged new inroads for SAGEVets with the Syracuse VA and Clear Path for Veterans (CPFV). They also featured SAGEVets at their Second Sunday virtual event to celebrate the VA's LGBT Health Awareness Week. Rita Gram, SAGEVets Co-Chair at SAGE Upstate, gave a powerful presentation at the CPFV Summit, where she shared history about anti-LGBT policy in the U.S. military with a special focus on our work with the Restoration of Honor Act. We are excited to build on this momentum, reaching veterans across the state as we seek to begin outreach in the Buffalo and Rochester area. Last month's edition of the [SAGE Upstate newsletter](#) featured a story about Beverly Taylor, an 86-year-old proud veteran of the Marine Corps who fell victim to a gay purge that resulted in an OTH discharge ending her military career. Over 114,000 veterans were discharged for their sexual orientation and gender identity between WWII and the end of Don't Ask Don't Tell in 2011. We thank SAGE Upstate Executive Director Kim Dill and SAGEVets Co-Chairs Rita Gram and Dan Bishop for their incredible work with SAGEVets.

SAGEVets Spotlight

Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Pinkela is a 53-year-old cisgender white gay male veteran. After serving his country for 29 years, he was discharged in 2016 with an other than honorable discharge based on an accusation that he "exposed" another service member to HIV. Ken lost everything with this discharge – his career, his retirement benefits, and his home. This has not stopped Ken from tirelessly pursuing a discharge upgrade to prove that the U.S. Army has made a terrible mistake. This has been no easy task. As Ken states, with military justice, "you are guilty until proven innocent." Currently, Ken has a law firm working to have his criminal case reviewed and dismissed. After several attempts, SAGEVets successfully referred Ken to a skilled Benefits Counselor at the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. Ken currently receives 50% disability compensation, but was evaluated in 1991 before sustaining additional combat injuries repeatedly until the end of his 29-year career. We helped Ken add almost a dozen additional health conditions to his claim, which is now pending with the Veterans Benefits Administration. SAGEVets is also supporting Ken with an upgrade application underway for New York's Restoration of Honor (ROH).

Ken stood up for all of us by taking the oath to serve, and we are working to return the favor. When we asked how the ROH can help, Ken replied, "The New York State Restoration of Honor process provides a wel-



Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Pinkela

come opportunity to have my career evaluated and recognized – that my 29 years of service to the Nation was Honorable from start to finish. The successful restoration of honor will be a powerful tool to include in my request to have my case reviewed and dismissed." This Memorial Day, please think about Ken, and the 114,000 veterans also discharged less than honorably between WWII and the end of Don't Ask Don't Tell due to discriminatory policies. We thank Ken for his ceaseless courage to fight for liberty and justice for all, including himself. For more about Ken, please view the short video put together by the [Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation](#) and a 2017 article in [Rolling Stone](#).

SAGE Programming

SAGEVets: Women's History Month

SAGEVets presented our Women's History Month program with the National Association of Black Military Women (NABMW) and the New York State Division of Veterans' Services (DVS). This program celebrated past and present contributions made by African American women in the military, and was moderated by Catherine La Porte, Northeast Region Chairwoman, NABMW, and Ashton Stewart. Shawanna Boyd, a SAGE Care Manager gave a strong presentation about the weekly SAGEVets support group she facilitates and her dedication to securing supportive services for veteran participants.

The discussion about women in the U.S. military history included Harriet Tubman and her military service, and the [6888](#), Central Postal Directory Battalion and how their contributions brought so much inspiration to U.S. soldiers. These stories not only inspire courage, they also remind us to take pride in who we are and refuse to be treated inequitably. Similarly to SAGEVets, the mission of the NABMW is to use history to mentor, support, and advocate for veterans. In this program, DVS and SAGEVets presented on the newly passed [Deborah Sampson Act](#), policy that requires the VA to improve healthcare for women, though it fails to address issues and services affecting LBT women. Also discussed was the successful campaign to rename the Manhattan VA the Margaret Cochran Corbin Campus of the New York Harbor Health Care System, as well as the recent end to the military's transgender ban policy. [A recording of the program available to watch](#).

Learn more about our resources for LGBT elders and SAGE's work at <http://sageusa.org>. For programs that are specific to New York, visit <http://sagenyc.org>.

Caregiving

Many people don't think they are caregivers. Still, if you are assisting your partner, spouse, friend or neighbor with shopping, escort services, laundry, household chores, cleaning or just regular check-ins, you fit the description. If you are a caregiver, or if someone is helping you, SAGE can help through its Caregiving support program. We provide counseling, support groups, case management, and can help pay for respite homecare, group socialization or specialized items. For more information [click here](#) or call 212-741-2247 and ask for the Care Manager on duty. SAGE's Caregiving Program is funded through the New York City Department for the Aging.

Veteran Support Group (VSG) – Now offered as a telephone meeting! Fridays from 2 – 3 pm

The VSG is facilitated by Shawanna Boyd, veteran of the U.S. Army National Guard and Care Manager at SAGE. Please contact Shawanna for info at sboyd@sageusa.org, and join us for engaged, casual conversation.

Finally, please take the time to fill out a quick survey on the SAGEVets newsletter. Your opinion matters>> <http://sageusa.org/sagevets-survey>

New York State SAGE Affiliates

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[SAGE Long Island](#)

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[SAGE Center Bronx at Crotona Pride House](#)

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[SAGE Center – Harlem](#)

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[SAGE Center Brooklyn at Stonewall House](#)

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[SAGE-Pride Center of Staten Island](#)

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