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NEW YORK CITY ANNOUNCES VETERANS AND ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS ARE NOW PROTECTED FROM DISCRIMINATION UNDER CITY HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

The new law makes it illegal for employers, landlords, and providers of public accommodations to discriminate against veterans and active military service members

NEW YORK— New York City has begun enforcement of a new law that protects current and prior military service members from discrimination, bias, and harassment. It is now illegal in New York City for employers, landlords, and providers of public accommodations to discriminate against veterans and active military service members due to their military status. The law, introduced in 2016 and signed by Mayor de Blasio in August 2017, establishes a protected class for veterans and active military service members under the NYC Human Rights Law to give them direct access to justice when their rights have been violated.

“The brave men and women that put their lives on the line for our country deserve to be treated with nothing but dignity and respect,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “This law will ensure all military and other uniformed service members, both returned and active, can live and work free from discrimination in New York City.”

“Veterans and active duty military service members make invaluable contributions to our City,” said **Department of Veterans’ Services Commissioner Loree Sutton, MD**. “We owe it to them to ensure that their service to our country is cause for celebration, not discrimination. I applaud the creation of this new law for providing the protections to our veterans and service members that they so richly deserve.”

“This new law will ensure that veterans and active military service members who risk their lives for this country are protected against discrimination and bias,” said **Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights, Carmelyn P. Malalis**. “We are proud to enforce this new law to get justice for victims and hold violators accountable so the brave individuals who serve this country get the dignity and respect they so richly deserve.”

“Veterans have dedicated years of their lives to protect the ideals that we live by, and the Council remains committed to making their needs a top priority – especially when it comes to preventing

employment discrimination,” said **New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “We are proud to have ushered this important piece of legislation and will continue to work hard to ensure the wellbeing of our veterans in New York City.”

New York State is home to nearly 900,000 veterans, 225,000 of whom call New York City home, and nearly 30,000 active duty military personnel and 30,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel statewide. Veterans and active military service members may experience discrimination and bias due to their military status in employment, housing, and public accommodations like stores, restaurants, and cabs. The most common forms of discrimination against veterans and active military service members include negative stereotypes about PTSD, unfounded fear of deployment, and the misconception that veterans and service member skill sets won’t transfer to civilian employment.

The NYC Commission on Human Rights, which enforces the new law, has the authority to fine violators with civil penalties of up to \$250,000 for willful and malicious violations of the Law and can award unlimited compensatory damages to victims, including emotional distress damages and other benefits.

The law is the City’s latest effort to remove unnecessary obstacles to housing, employment, and public accommodations for veterans and active military service members and ensure that they have the resources and protections they need to thrive. In addition to creating the Department of Veterans’ Services in 2015, the Mayor and the City Council have quadrupled funding and staff in support of the Department over the last two years, which has also expanded employment opportunities for our veterans, launched an IDNYC veteran designator, and brought veterans’ mental health services to the forefront.

If you are a veteran or active military service members and believe you have been subject of discrimination because of your military service, or any other type of discrimination under the NYC Human Rights Law, call the Commission’s Infoline at 718-722-3131. Reports may also be filed anonymously and reported on the [Commission’s website](#).

For more information on the new protections, read a [factsheet](#) and [FAQs](#) on the Commission’s website at [NYC.Gov/HumanRights](#).

“Too often, we thank veterans with our words, but not our actions. We have left them vulnerable and undefended once they return home,” said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams**. “This law provides much-needed protections and support to those who have served in uniform, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of veteran or military status. I’m proud of my work to pass this bill, and that this law will help ensure that the promises we’ve made to our veterans are kept.”

“As Americans, it is our obligation to ensure that our nation’s heroes aren’t just appreciated when they return home – but also protected from discrimination. New York City has made great strides in becoming one of the most veteran-friendly cities in the country, but there is still work to be done,” said **Council Member Eric Ulrich**. “As Chair of the Veterans Committee, I am

proud to support this new legislation, which will protect the 225,000 brave men and women in uniform who call New York City home.”

“As the new law adding current or prior service in the uniformed services to the City’s Human Rights Law takes effect, our City will be able to help protect veterans and active military members from discrimination in the essentials of life,” said **Executive Director of Brooklyn Defenders Services Lisa Schreibersdorf**. “I thank Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Councilmember Williams, and Public Advocate Letitia James for providing the NYC Commission on Human Rights with the power and resources to fight the compounding discrimination that our justice-involved veteran clients endure, such as barriers to employment, education, and housing. I look forward to working with the Commission to help our City’s veterans and military members get the redress they need and deserve.”

“This law creates an important alternative to state and federal protections that can take so long that some veterans are discouraged from asserting their claims,” said **Coco Culhane, Director of the Veteran Advocacy Project**. “Providing local legal recourse for discrimination against men and women in uniform not only ensures veterans’ rights, it sends the message that New York City values those who have served and sacrificed.”

“We are proud that this legislation emerged from our membership meetings, and we thank Public Advocate Letitia James and Council Member Jumaane Williams for their leadership in introducing and championing the inclusion of past and present military service in our city’s robust Human Rights Law,” said **Kristen L. Rouse, U.S. Army Veteran and Founding Director of the NYC Veterans Alliance**. “We are proud of the many veterans and family members who spoke up about their experiences of discrimination, urging NYC Council Members to pass this into law. This is a wonderful example of what community advocates and elected officials can accomplish together to protect and improve the lives of NYC veterans, servicemembers, and their families.”

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