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This Man Was Just Told He Can't Enlist In The Military Because He's Transgender

But the ban on transgender people enlisting was lifted, by court order, on Jan. 1.

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[\[Photo\]](#)



Several openly transgender Americans started to enlist in the armed forces for the first time this week, with the end of a formal ban on transgender people being able to serve openly. But a man in Washington, DC, faced an abrupt rejection on Wednesday when the Air Force Reserve said he would not be able to enlist simply for being transgender.

“I was pretty appalled,” Parker A., who asked that only an initial be used for his last name, said in an interview with BuzzFeed News. Two recruiters turned him away when he called the main application phone number, Parker said. “When I contacted the Air Force Reserves, I was hopeful that all the roadblocks would be leveled and I could be processed. However, to my dismay, they were not.”

Parker, 24, attends American University, where he's on track to complete his master's degree in terrorism and homeland security this spring; he's been attempting to enlist for the past five years. In a final windfall, courts recently halted President Trump's ban on transgender service

and a federal judge ordered that new transgender recruits must be allowed starting Jan. 1.

“When I called yesterday, it was my last attempt, because it’s disheartening to be refused,” he said.

BuzzFeed News contacted the worker at the Air Force Reserve recruiting station who had rejected Parker. He would only identify himself as Dave. He confirmed Parker’s account in a phone interview, saying, “Right now a person who is transgender is not eligible to enter the Air Force Reserve. That is based on our guidance.”

But spokespeople for both the Pentagon and the Air Force Reserve confirmed in interviews with BuzzFeed News on Thursday that transgender Americans are indeed allowed, by current policy, to enlist in the military, provided they meet other entrance criteria.

Col. Bruce Bender, a spokesperson for Air Force Reserve Command, said the man at the recruiting station was “in error,” adding that the man was a civilian employee, not a member of the service.

“We certainly regret missing a potential recruit in this situation,” said Bender. “We strive to make sure accurate information gets to our contractors, and sometimes information is slow to get to the distant ends, because we work in a bureaucracy.”

“We are ensuring that all the call center contractors have the correct information,” he said.

US Army Maj. Dave Eastburn added, “We truly appreciate you bringing this issue to our attention, and now that we have this information, we will reach out to the call center and rectify the issue. We are doing everything we can to ensure everyone understands the new standards, preventing something like this from happening again.”

After the Air Force Reserve was contacted by BuzzFeed News about Parker’s rejection, officials wanted to contact him to make amends.

An Air Force major was “extremely apologetic” in a phone call, Parker said. “She said if I have any problems in the future to not hesitate to call her. She made it feel like I was wanted by the Air Force.”

Pentagon brass sent a memorandum to every component of the Department of Defense on Dec. 8, 2017, describing how transgender people could start to enlist.

A decades-long ban on transgender service had first been lifted by the Obama administration in June of 2016. The Pentagon, which found transgender people would not bog down the military, initially announced new transgender troops may enlist by July 1, 2017.

But Trump reversed that decision, saying transgender people would be banned and claiming they would render the military “burdened with medical costs and disruption.” Amid a court challenge, the administration postponed the new enlistment until Jan. 1, 2018, and then

attempted to delay that, too. Nevertheless, judges suspended Trump's ban, saying it was likely to be held unconstitutional. The Justice Department [said](#) on Dec. 29 that it would stop fighting the Jan. 1 enlistment opening while it continued to defend the ban in federal court.

In contrast, the Pentagon and Air Force Reserve were clear the doors are open to transgender applicants.

"The Department of Defense is making every attempt to ensure the new policy is distributed and understood across the entire department," Eastburn said.

The new process is going smoothly in other areas. On Thursday, Nicholas Bade, a transgender man in Chicago, met with his Air Force recruiter to sign paperwork authorizing his application. He told BuzzFeed News, "It went really well."

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