

AMA blasts reasoning for military's transgender policy

By JULIE WATSON Associated Press

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SAN DIEGO — A new Trump administration regulation set to go into effect Friday directs military secretaries to kick out transgender service members who refuse to serve in their birth sex and "given an opportunity to correct those deficiencies."

The American Medical Association told The Associated Press on Thursday the policy and its wording mischaracterizes transgender people as having a "deficiency" and defies science by classifying the need to transition to another gender among "administratively disqualifying conditions" that include those the Pentagon has labeled as a "congenital or developmental defects."

The new regulation strips transgender troops of rights they only recently secured under the Obama administration to serve openly and receive care if they choose to transition to another gender.

The Defense Department said its use of the words "deficiencies" is military lingo for when an individual fails to meet standards to maintain a lethal force. Lt. Col. Carla Gleason said it is not a reference to gender dysphoria, a condition of extreme distress from not identifying with one's biological gender.

The department says transgender people can serve if they remain in their biological sex. It would allow current service members who transitioned before the Pentagon issued its directive, though the government has also said it retains the right to eliminate that protection.

"The only thing deficient is any medical science behind this decision," said American Medical Association President Dr. Barbara L. McAneny. "The AMA has said repeatedly that there is no medically valid reason — including a diagnosis of gender dysphoria — to exclude transgender individuals from military service."

The Pentagon issued a directive March 12 stating military secretaries may kick out someone "on the basis of conditions and circumstances not constituting a physical disability that interfere with assignment to or performance of duty based on a diagnosis of gender dysphoria where the service member is unable or unwilling to adhere to all applicable standards, including the standards associated with his or her biological sex, or seeks transition to another gender."

It said the process should come after an individual "has been formally counseled on his or her failure to adhere to such standards and has been given an opportunity to correct those deficiencies."

The policy calls for troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria to be medically evaluated before letting them go to see if they could qualify as having a disability. Otherwise gender dysphoria can be considered as a "condition that interferes with military service" like sleep walking, bed wetting, motion sickness, and personality disorders, etc.

"They can dress it up in whatever words they want, but when you carefully look at this it's total disrespect for these human beings by saying a core piece of them is not acceptable," former acting U.S. Army Surgeon General Gale Pollock said.

Pollock signed a statement with two former U.S. surgeons general and two other former military surgeons general, saying they are "troubled by the Defense Department's characterization of the need to undergo gender transition as a 'deficiency,' and by the addition of gender dysphoria to official lists of 'congenital or developmental defects' that include bed-wetting and 'disturbances of perception, thinking, emotional control, or behavior.'"

An estimated 14,700 troops identify as transgender.

Military chiefs testified before Congress last year that they found no problems with transgender troops on morale or unit cohesion. Many have received medals since the armed forces welcomed them in 2016.

Transgender troops say the regulation mirrors the "don't ask, don't tell" policy that prohibited gay men and women from serving openly in the armed forces before Congress repealed it in 2010.