



# SAGEVets Newsletter

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

Winter 2021

## Dear SAGE Veterans and Friends:

As we slowly dig ourselves out of this pandemic, we are beginning to see signs of progress that go well beyond vaccinations. Policies protecting LGBT veterans are changing for the better. On January 25, 2021, the Biden-Harris administration revoked the U.S. military's transgender ban. Transgender soldiers who are currently dedicating their hearts and souls to our country are once again welcome to serve and reenlist, and to be treated as equals. SAGEVets is proud to have nominated New York State's first transgender veteran, [Renée Imperato](#), who was inducted into the Senate's Veterans Hall of Fame last November. Renée is a social justice icon, radicalized by her service in Vietnam. Also in New York, [Ken Pinkela](#), SAGE veteran and advocate for LGBT veteran rights, was featured in Hudson Valley local media, elevating a new report by SAGE and AARP NY which includes an array of policy and [legislative solutions for older LGBT New Yorkers](#) at both the state and local levels of government. Lastly, we thank Governor Cuomo for signing the [Restoration of Honor \(ROH\) Act](#) into law the day after Veterans Day. Read more about how this legislation is making a difference for LGBT veterans like Louis Miller in this issue's SAGEVets Spotlight.



SAGEVets-mobile on Veterans Day [WABC's Ewewitness News](#)

SAGEVets was out in front this year representing LGBT veterans in at the historic [New York City Veterans Day Parade](#). As one of only 120 vehicles in a symbolic Veterans Day Motorcade, SAGEVets was honored to show our pride. In national news, SAGE veteran La Wanda Mobley and I were featured

on the NPR program [Marketplace](#) in a segment focusing on the history of LGBTQ discrimination in the U.S. military and how it affects veterans' access to economic and health benefits, especially those with less than honorable discharges.

We would like to thank our champions who are working locally, state-wide and nationally to end discrimination against LGBT veterans and those who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). In the words of poet laureate Amanda Gorman, "Let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left with."

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

SAGEVets continues to engage older LGBT veterans by offering virtual programming. We would appreciate if you would share these invitations! The more the merrier for an engaging program. Please pre-register for any of the following events by calling us or using the link.

[Virtual Veterans Resource Fair](#) hosted by Long Island Cares, Feb. 24, 1 - 2 pm

[Webinar - Care & Support for Veterans, Especially Those with Dementia](#), hosted by Senior Helpers, Feb. 25, 11 am - noon

[Protect Yourself Against Fraud: COVID-19 Scams](#) Hosted by Federal Trade Commission, March 18, 6 - 7 pm

[SAGEVets Legal Advocacy & LGBT History Month at the VA](#), Hosted by SAGE Upstate, March 23, 6 - 7:30 pm

[Webinar - Voices From the Black Women Veteran Community](#) SAGEVets partnering with the National Association of Black Military Women, March 31, 6 - 7:30 pm

**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:

Thanks to the generous support from our legal partners at the New York State Division of Veterans Services (NYSDVS), Volunteers of Legal Service, Veteran Advocacy Project, and Proskauer Rose LLP, SAGEVets continues to connect older LGBT veterans to referrals for legal counsel and full representation. Cases include issues such as veteran benefits, public benefits, housing, family law, immigration, advanced planning, as well as discharge upgrades at the federal level through the Department of Defense, and at the state level through the Restoration of Honor (ROH) Act. The implementation of the ROH is gaining momentum throughout the City and State as NYSDVS announced partnerships with the NYS Bar Association and the Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School – both organizations will be providing assistance to veterans with meritorious ROH claims in assembling application packages. SAGEVets was honored to receive a thank you letter and commemoration coin from Joel Evans, NYSDVS Executive Deputy Director, for our partnership in implementing ROH and for SAGEVets programs that highlight the LGBT veteran experience.

On February 8, 2021 SAGEVets won another service-connected disability case, along with a retroactive lump-sum payment! We thank *you*, veteran, for your courage to bring your military experience to the attention of the Veterans Benefits Administration and congratulate you on winning your case. SAGE is grateful to our legal partners at Proskauer for its pro-bono support and dedication to this case. Thank you to all of SAGEVets' legal partners for helping us work to correct injustices of the past.

### Pushing for Policies that Improve the Experiences of Older LGBT Vets

We are experiencing increased need for veteran legislative advocacy, especially following our proactive work supporting the ROH. Ashton and Melissa Sklarz, SAGE's Senior Government Relations Strategist, attended a virtual meeting of the New York State Council of Veterans Organizations Legislative Committee. Together they advocated for the Council to include Bill [A9640/ S8280](#) in their FY21 legislative priorities, which they did. This bill, sponsored by Assemblymember Didi Barrett and Senator Brad Hoylman, adds veterans who have qualifying conditions or who are discharged as LGBT veterans to certain provisions that apply to veterans who have been honorably discharged or released from military service. More acutely, it will allow approved eligible applicants under the ROH an opportunity to receive credits for their public retirement systems of the state (pension buyback) for military service. The Council strongly supports this legislation as it was instrumental in fostering the initial pension buyback bill in 2016, [Senate Bill 7160](#). The bill is currently in committee. Please urge your elected representatives to support this important legislation.



### Teaching Diversity

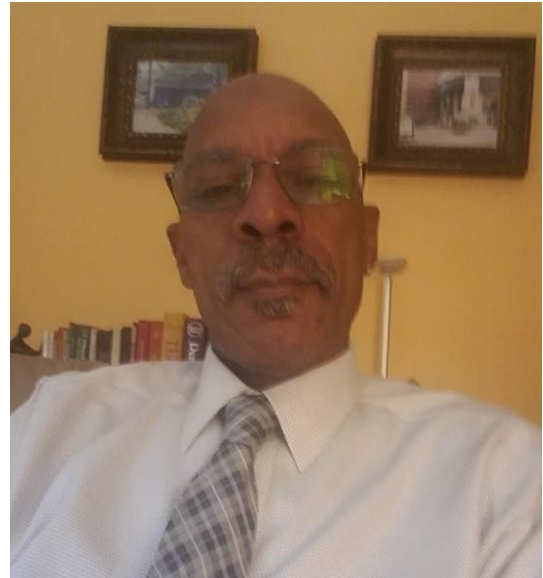
**SAGEVets** is honored to be part of an exciting partnership with the [Intrepid Sea, Air, & Space Museum](#) and the New York City Department of Education. *LGBTQ+ Virtual Field Trips* is a program designed for NYC youth that focuses on raising awareness about LGBTQ+ veterans who served during and prior to the military's discriminatory policy, Don't Ask Don't Tell. SAGEVets assisted with drafting interview questions and connecting several older LGBT veterans with the program to share their personal stories and experiences while serving. The goal of the program is to let students know that despite the anti-LGBT policies of the U.S. military that existed during the time, LGBT people *did* serve. These stories highlight personal triumph over discrimination, sexism, and racism.



Do you identify as LGBTQ+? Did you serve on the U.S.S. Intrepid? We want to hear from you! Please contact: [astewart@sageusa.org](mailto:astewart@sageusa.org)

## SAGEVets Spotlight

This winter's spotlight is on Louis Miller, a 63-year-old Black cisgender gay male veteran of the U.S. Navy. While serving, he repeatedly received 4.0 performance evaluations, the highest possible score, earned the Sailor of the Month award several times, and was nominated for Sailor of the Year by the Commanding Officers. Despite his exemplary service, a disgruntled sailor reported suspicions that Louis was gay. After a subsequent investigation, he was discharged with an other than honorable discharge for "Homosexuality – engaged in, or attempted to engage in a homosexual act or acts." Louis reached out to us after hearing about the Restoration of Honor Act, and we helped him submit one of the first applications to the NYSDVS and have his honor restored by the State of New York. We are also working on finding him private legal representation to upgrade his discharge with the Department of Defense. When asked how SAGEVets and the Restoration of Honor (ROH) Act has helped, Louis stated, "I have enormous admiration for the U.S. Navy, but not the policy that ended my career. I have felt haunted by



this discharge every time it comes up, but going through this process of getting my discharge upgraded has helped me reenter a social space that I had avoided for far too long, and suddenly I have confidence in myself, and the quality of duty I provided the U.S. military. I would encourage others in my situation to apply for the ROH and reclaim your honor."

## Don't Ask Don't Tell Decennial Anniversary 12.22.2020



**SAGEVets** continues to push forward in advocating for older LGBT veterans. We had great success with our two-part *Make America United* program with our partners at the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. We thank U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand for providing us with a welcome letter and for her comments recognizing how the impacts of DADT still shape our work. The letter provided us with the perfect starting point to launch the *Make America United* program. [Part One](#) addressed the history of anti-LGBT policies in the U.S. Military and the remarkable evolution that led to the end of the Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy. We also featured veterans who were discharged due to their sexual orientation and focused on the newly implemented Restoration of Honor Act in New York State. [Part Two](#) took place on December 22nd, the ten-year anniversary of the repeal of DADT, and featured Queens District Attorney, Melinda Katz, who opened the program by voicing her commitment to veterans and the LGBT community and sharing details about her work within Veterans Treatment Courts.

## SAGE Programming

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

### Caregiving

Many people don't think they are caregivers, but if you are assisting your partner, spouse, friend or neighbor with shopping, escort, 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](mailto: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

### SAGE Hudson Valley

300 Wall Street  
Kingston, NY 12402  
845-331-5300  
[programs@lgbtqcenter.org](mailto:programs@lgbtqcenter.org)

### SAGE Long Island

125 Kennedy Drive, Suite #100  
Hauppauge, NY 11781  
631-665-2300  
[koneill@lgbtnetwork.org](mailto:koneill@lgbtnetwork.org)

### SAGE Rochester

100 College Avenue, Suite #100  
Rochester, NY 14607  
585-244-8640  
[SAGE@outalliance.org](mailto:SAGE@outalliance.org)

### SAGE Upstate

431 E. Fayette Street, Suite #050  
Syracuse, NY 13202  
315-478-1923  
[lsloan@sageusa.org](mailto:lsloan@sageusa.org)

## New York City SAGE Centers

### Edie Windsor SAGE Center – Manhattan

305 Seventh Avenue, 15th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
646-576-8669  
[info@sageusa.org](mailto:info@sageusa.org)

### SAGE Center Bronx at Crotona Pride House

1784 Prospect Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10457  
[jcollazo@sageusa.org](mailto:jcollazo@sageusa.org)

### SAGE Center – Harlem

220 West 143rd Street  
New York, NY 10030  
646-660-8954  
[sageharlem@sageusa.org](mailto:sageharlem@sageusa.org)

### SAGE Center Brooklyn at Stonewall House

271 Myrtle Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
212-741-2247  
[sagebrooklyn@sageusa.org](mailto:sagebrooklyn@sageusa.org)

### SAGE-GRIOT Senior Center – Brooklyn

GRIOT Circle, Inc.  
25 Flatbush Avenue, 5th Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
718-246-2775  
[reunion@griotcircle.org](mailto:reunion@griotcircle.org)

### SAGE-Pride Center of Staten Island

Pride Center of Staten Island  
25 Victory Boulevard, 3rd Floor  
Staten Island, NY 10301  
718-808-1365  
[lsloan@sageusa.org](mailto:lsloan@sageusa.org)

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