August 8, 2017

The Honorable Jim Mattis
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis:

The American Academy of Nursing supports existing U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) policy on transgender service members serving in the military developed following extensive study and consultation among military leadership, health experts and others.

As nurse leaders, the Academy is committed to ensuring dignified and respectful health care for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Understanding that sexual orientation is an innate human characteristic that deserves the full protection of the law aligns with the Academy’s mission of promoting diversity and eliminating health disparities across the nation. The Code of Ethics for Nurses (2016) compels us to practice “with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth and unique attributes of every person.”

A recent RAND study found that, among the 18 foreign militaries that allow transgender persons to serve openly, there was “little or no impact on unit cohesion, operational effectiveness, or readiness” (https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1530.html). According to the same RAND Corporation study, approximately 4,000 transgender service members currently serve openly in the U.S. military on active duty and in the selective reserves.

The mission of the Department of Defense is to provide the military forces needed to deter war and to protect the security of our country. As noted in the DoD Transgender Implementation Handbook, "There are transgender service members in uniform today...individuals who want to serve and can meet the Department’s standards should be afforded the opportunity to compete to do so." (https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2016/0616_policy/DoDTGHandbook_093016.pdf).

The Academy opposes employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and supports transgender health equity.

Sincerely,

Bobbie Berkowitz, PhD, RN, FAAN
President, American Academy of Nursing