



## Upcoming Events

### September 2017

September 15–October 15

Hispanic Heritage Month

(VACO Commemoration September 21)

AAFEA, Inc. Annual Training Conference

September 18–20; College Park, MD

LULAC Federal Training Institute Partnership

September 20–22; Washington, DC

ODI Training: Barrier Analysis

September 21, 1–4 pm

ODI Training: VSSC

September 26, 10–11:30 pm

## ORM

### Steps Toward Conflict Resolution

### Alternative Dispute Resolution

202-461-0280

### Resolution Support Center or Harassment Prevention Program

1-888-56-NEW VA

(1-888-566-3982)

To file a discrimination or harassment complaint, you must contact the [Office of Resolution Management](#) at (toll free) 1-888-737-3361 within 45 calendar days of the date of the alleged discriminatory incident.

## Message from the DAS

### Reaffirming Our Promise

By Georgia Coffey

“To care for (those) who shall have borne the battle...” This is the noble mission that President Abraham Lincoln conferred upon us in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). With that conferral, we have the proud obligation to honor our Veterans with the care, services, and respect they earned by putting their lives in harm’s way. From the Civil War, through World War II, to present day conflicts, our Veterans fought for principles that define our nation: freedom, equality, diversity, and inclusion.



GEORGIA COFFEY

This past month, we witnessed events that assaulted these defining values in America and dishonored those who fought and died to eradicate racism, anti-Semitism, and bigotry in the world. The repugnant display of hate and violence by white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and the Ku Klux Klan in Charlottesville serve as tragic reminders that our work in civil rights and inclusion is not finished. Our hearts go to the families of those who lost lives and suffered injuries, and we join the growing chorus of universal condemnation of these misguided acts.

This event comes on the heels of other external events which have prompted questions and raised concerns from some of our employees regarding the status of Federal Government’s commitment to diversity and inclusion in public service. The most recent include the proposed reversal of policies on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) protections in [employment](#) and [military service](#). These developments, coupled with the heated debates on the display of Confederate images, religious/ethnic profiling, and race-based disparities in law enforcement have caused some to question the sustainability of our commitment to civil rights and full inclusion in VA. ([Continued on the next page.](#))

## Commemorate

### Hispanic Heritage Month

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Hispanic Heritage month this September 15 to October 15. This year’s theme is “Shaping the Bright Future of America.” VA managers and supervisors are encouraged to support events and activities that recognize Hispanics and their many contributions to American society. The VA Central Office (VACO) Hispanic Heritage Month event will be held on Thursday, September 21, 2017, in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, room 230, at noon. For more information, contact [Ms. Edith Perry](#), VA’s National Hispanic Employment Program Manager. ([Continued on the next page.](#))

## Commemorate

### [Continued from the previous page](#)

During National Hispanic Heritage Month we celebrate the cultures, histories, and significant contributions Hispanics have made to our Nation. In 1968, Congress passed Public Law 40-498 to honor the achievements of Hispanics in America with histories and cultures from ancestors who came from Spain, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Congress, by Public Law 100-402, as amended, authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation designating September 15 through October 15 as “National Hispanic Heritage Month.” These dates are significant as they commemorate the independence of various Latin American countries including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Chile. As of July 31, 2017, Hispanics represented 6.81 percent of VA’s permanent workforce. Of its permanent workforce, VA employs 117,956 Veterans, of which 7.62 percent are Hispanic. In addition, VA has been experiencing less than expected participation for Hispanic men and women when compared to the Relevant Civilian Labor Force. Hispanic men have less than expected participation rates at GS-10, GS-12 through 15 and women have less than expected participation rates at GS-10, GS-12 through 15, and Senior Executive Service/Title 38 equivalent pay grades when compared to the pay grade distribution of the total VA workforce. Although VA continues to develop and implement strategies to improve outreach and career development, the numbers indicate that considerable work is ahead to ensure that Hispanics are fully included in VA’s workforce. All VA supervisors, employees, and hiring managers are encouraged to learn about and generate a greater awareness of the Department’s Hispanic employment outreach program. Visit [VA’s Hispanic Employment Program webpage](#) for more information.

## Message from the DAS (Cont.)

### [Continued from the previous page](#)

I want to be clear as VA’s Chief Diversity Officer that our pledge to supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in VA, including but not limited to the protections of the LGBT community, remains unwavering. To that point, in July, Secretary Shulkin issued his annual **EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy Statement**, reaffirming VA’s commitment to equal employment opportunity protections and full inclusion for all in our workforce. Further, in a recent interview he stated “Once a person signs up to defend our country, they have to know that the VA is there and committed to them through the end of their life...that's not going to change; our commitment is there forever” adding that the commitment will continue to apply to **Transgender Veterans**. Finally, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion just published VA’s first official **Handbook on Transgender Employee Transition Guidance (VA Handbook 5975.4)** to support transitioning Transgender employees in the VA workplace. These commitments are unequivocal to our employees and to all who receive VA’s benefits and services.

The aforementioned events may reveal what appears to be a more ego-centric world view – a priority of the “self” over the “collective.” While reasonable people can disagree on the underlying issues, we in public service, leaders at all levels, must be vigilant in our responsibility to stem what Winston Churchill called “the fury of intolerance” during the last World War. As a nation, our commitment to social justice has been tested before – by Jim Crow laws, Japanese American internments, and the disenfranchisement of women and minorities, all in the name of social order and national security. Despite these historical lessons, the insidious vestiges of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia sadly persist.

I ask all of us to stand firm in the values that define our country – that all men and women are created equal – and heed the advice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who challenged us to “rise above the narrow confines of (our) individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” It is a slippery slope when we compartmentalize ourselves into individualized factions governed by self-interest. Let us not repeat the mistakes of history by placing our ego-centric concerns over the broader concerns of humanity. In the final analysis, our survival on this small planet is based on the realization that our lives are inextricably linked and our interests inseparably interdependent.

*For more information on the implications of recent development relating to LGBT issues, please read “**Recent Implications Concerning LGBT Protections in the Federal Workforce**” by Sterling Akins, VA’s National LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager, ODI, on the [next page](#).*

# Recent Implications Concerning LGBT Protections in the Federal Workforce

By Sterling O. Akins, VA's National LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager, ODI

VA continues its fervent mission of serving our valued Veterans, and in tandem, supporting our diverse workforce that faithfully executes that mission.

Included in that daily mission is VA's objective in building workforce diversity and cultivating workplace inclusion, including our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) employees. The pursuit of these goals are in accordance with its established employee protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, in our VA-wide EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, and No Fear Policy Statements and associated Directives.

Recent reports in our media have indicated a proposed reinstatement of a transgender ban in the United States Armed Forces. In a related occurrence, the Department of Justice (DOJ) filed an Amicus Curiae Brief ("A Friend of the Court") which states that sexual orientation is not included in the protections under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on other widely known bases such as: race, color, religion, national origin, and sex. As a result of this recent reporting, some primary questions raised by our Veterans or workforce may be "What are some of the possible immediate or long term effects, and if there are any, what impact would they have on the VA?"

In addressing the first concern relating to the proposed reinstatement of the transgender ban in the U.S. Armed Forces, it may be premature to anticipate who might be affected by such a ban or what impact the ban (if implemented) may have on VA, its Federal workforce, and the Veterans VA serves. The initial reporting of the proposed ban or the intention of establishing one was conveyed by way of a tweet by the President, which does not have any immediate legal impact. At this time, the tweet is not policy and an Executive Order has not been issued on the subject.

Notwithstanding such changes, VA Secretary David Shulkin has remained vigilant in assuring that VA would stay true to its mission of ensuring "that Veterans know that the VA is a safe place to get their care, that we value and respect the dignity of all our Veterans." ([Military.com](#))

The second concern, which applies more to VA's Federal workforce, is more speculative in nature as it primarily deals with a private sector case, but may have far reaching implications within our Federal Government. The recent filing by DOJ and a more recent filing by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on the subject of sexual orientation protection under Title VII offers two opposing viewpoints. One, by the DOJ, asserts that sexual orientation is not a protected basis under Title VII, while the other, by EEOC, affirms that sexual discrimination based on sexual orientation is a violation under Title VII. It is important to note that EEOC has longstanding jurisdiction over enforcement of Title VII protections in the Federal sector. Until this issue rises to the jurisdiction and legal interpretation of the Supreme Court and it rules otherwise, VA respective policies will continue to subscribe to the current holding of the EEOC.

In conclusion, VA has remained, and will continue to remain, steadfast in its commitment to our Veterans, our workforce, and our welcoming and inclusive environment, remaining free from discrimination or harassment based on the protected classes, including sexual orientation or gender identity.

## Policy Alert

### VA Handbook 5011/29, Disabled Veteran Leave

This policy update establishes a new leave category in accordance with the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 known as "Disabled Veteran Leave" for Title 5 and Title 38 employees. For more information, contact **Worklife and Benefits Service (058)**.

## Training

### External Affinity Conferences

A list of [External Affinity Conferences Approved for VA-Wide Participation for Fiscal Year 2018](#) is now available online in accordance with 5 USC Chapter 41 and 5 CFR 410.404; President Obama's Executive Order 13583 on Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce; and the VA's Diversity and Inclusion Policy Directive 5975 and Strategic Plan. ([Continued on the next page.](#))

## Training (Cont.)

### Barrier Analysis Training

Barrier Analysis Training covers all aspects of the barrier analysis process under Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Management Directive 715 to include analysis and interpretation of workforce statistics, trigger identification, barrier analysis investigation, preparing action plans, and following up on the action plan. This training will allow participants to work through the majority of the process using VA specific workforce statistics. Attendees must register through the VA Talent Management System. The course will be offered on Thursday, September 21, 2017, from 1:00 to 4:00 pm (EST). For more information, contact [Ms. Ryan Pugh](#), Management Analyst, ODI.

### VSSC Training

VISN Support Service Center, or VSSC, training is designed to alert a wide range of managers, human resources specialists, EEO specialists, and diversity specialists to VSSC's HR query applications. All managers have a duty to ensure there is equal opportunity in the workplace with regard to hiring, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment. This training provides guidance on how to properly use the applications to conduct various workforce analyses, identify triggers, and validate or begin to address potential barriers to equal employment opportunities at VA. Attendees must register through the VA Talent Management System. This interactive training will be offered on Tuesday, September 26, 2017, from 10 to

11:30 am (EST). For more information, contact [Ms. Camille Whitfield](#), Management Analyst, ODI.

### AAFEA, Inc. Annual Training Workshop

The African American Federal Executives Association (AAFEA, Inc.) will be hosting its 13th Annual Training Workshop in College Park, Maryland, Monday, September 18, through Wednesday, September 20, 2017. Employees who wish to attend must register on the [AAFEA website](#). Employees are responsible for securing authorization to attend from their respective supervisors before registering. For more information, contact [Ms. Tynnetta Lee](#), VA's National African American Employment Program Manager, ODI.



### LULAC Federal Training Institute Partnership

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) will be hosting its Fifth Annual Federal Training Institute Partnership (FTIP) in the Washington, DC metro area Wednesday, September 20, through Friday, September 22, 2017. This event is free of charge to all Federal employees regardless of grade and position as it is FTIP's goal is to develop a diverse pool of leaders for the future. Employees who wish to attend the FTIP must pre-register. Registration will open the first week of September. More information on the registration process will be provided on the [LULAC website](#). Employees are responsible for securing authorization to attend from their respective supervisors before registering. For more information, contact [Ms. Edith Perry](#), VA's National Hispanic Employment Program Manager, ODI.

## Women Veterans and Harassment

### VHA Remains Committed to Ending Harassment in Facilities

All Veterans deserve to receive care in environments that attend to their dignity, safety, and privacy. While U.S. Military policies have evolved to create equal treatment for service women, in a recent national survey of women Veteran primary care patients, 1 in 4 women Veterans who frequently visited VHA facilities reported harassment on VHA grounds. Examples of reported harassment include unwelcome comments or conduct in public spaces, including sexual harassment such as catcalling by strangers, and verbal slurs. (Source: *National Study: HSR&D study Implementation of Women's Health PACTs CRE 12-026, Yano PI*)

Women's health clinics provide gender sensitive environments that are welcoming to women Veterans. That same environment should be present throughout other areas of the hospital and clinics. VA has a Women Veterans Call Center which can be reached by calling 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) to provide women Veterans, their families, and caregivers' assistance with VA services and resources. The Office of Mental Health Services has a Military Sexual Trauma Support program and offers free, confidential treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to sexual trauma. To access additional information, training materials, and resources for local outreach to women Veterans, contact [Dr. Maggie Czarnogorski](#), Deputy Director, Comprehensive Women's Health, VHA.

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Office of Diversity & Inclusion  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW (06) | Washington, DC 20420 | 202-461-4131 | 202-501-2145 (Fax)