



Rapporteurs: Zoe Dutton, Elizabeth Yang

On March 10, 2022, CNA held its second Inclusive National Security event of the year (@InclusiveNatSec on Twitter), continuing this year's focus on the relationship between gender and national security. This month's event ([recording here](#)), "Gender Stereotypes and Transgender Service Members," reflected on the considerable policy changes related to transgender servicemembers and featured a discussion with Lt Col Bree Fram, the highest ranking active duty transgender officer in the Department of Defense (DOD). Lt Col Fram is Deputy Chief of the Acquisition Policies and Processes Division in the US Space Force and Co-Lead of the Department of the Air Force Transgender Policy Team. Dr. Máel Embser-Herbert, professor of sociology at Hamline University, moderated the event. Lt Col Fram and Dr. Embser-Herbert discussed the challenges of dealing with stereotypes of and biases against transgender servicemembers, and their ability to serve, as well as the progress being made on these issues. Below are some takeaways from the event.

Reflections from Lt Col Bree Fram:

- Lt Col Fram reflected on her personal experience of acceptance within the DOD by emphasizing her experience of being valued and accepted by her colleagues. Lt Col Fram came out as transgender on the day that the transgender ban was dropped by DOD in 2016. Although nervous and apprehensive, Lt Col Fram was floored as each colleague, one by one, came up to her and stated, "It's an honor to serve with you."
- Allyship for the transgender community is centered on the concept of leading with intentional inclusivity, which can look like a commander sharing *why* an inclusive environment is valuable and how such an environment enables the unit to have the best people and talent, regardless of gender or orientation.
- The military is used to seeing vulnerability as a weakness; rather, it should be viewed as a reflective symbol of one's ability to lead and their willingness to invest in relationships to open up pathways for connection with individuals. Intentionally reaching out helps someone understand your humanity and desire for connection.
- DOD is stronger when people are able to bring their full selves to their jobs and do not need to hide their identities. While Don't Ask, Don't Tell was in place, many LGBT individuals felt limited in their ability to fully contribute—Lt Col Fram reflected, "I can be good at what I do, and even great, but when I have to hold back even that little bit, that limits my potential to just how good I can be."
- A wide range of stereotypes exist about transgender people in the military. Lt Col Fram was told that she broke a colleague's stereotype of transgender people just by showing up every day and doing her job. Lt Col Fram is cognizant that many more stereotypes need to be shattered and encourages others to do so by pushing forward and simply showing up and doing their assigned mission task better than what is expected.
- Dr. Embser-Herbert added that when they served in the DOD, gender-based harassment and abuse were largely tolerated and that such harassment and abuse remains a significant issue to this day. They highlighted that although the DOD does not always reflect a positive view of gender diversity, DOD leadership understands that the world is moving forward and that they need to move with it. We can recognize and celebrate progress today without conflating it with acceptance of the past.

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