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## **Written Testimony In Support of Senate Bill No. 70, An Act Restoring Benefits to Veterans Discharged Under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'**

Senator Leone, Representative Hennessy and distinguished members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, I'm Andrew Schneider, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, offering testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 70, An Act Restoring Benefits to Veterans Discharged Under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'

Between 1993, when the so-called 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' rule took effect in our nation's military until 2011, when it was repealed, more than 13,000 service members received less than honorable discharges because of their sexual orientation. These patriotic lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans have been denied many of the benefits meant for those who served their country, including some benefits administered by or through the state of Connecticut.

Under Chapter 506 of the Connecticut General Statutes, many benefits are reserved for veterans who were honorably discharged. These include eligibility to live in the state Veterans' Home, to be buried in the state cemetery for veterans and to receive charitable assistance through the American Legion from the state's Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund. This legislation will restore those benefits to military veterans who did serve their country honorably and should never have been punished and excluded simply for being who they are. As our country moves toward repairing the damage inflicted by years of discrimination, the state must be sure to keep up.

The struggle for equal treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual soldiers, sailors and Marines and veterans continues at the Pentagon, in the courts and in the halls of Congress. Full benefits for same-sex military spouses and dependents, reinstatement of service members discharged under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," acceptance of transgendered service members and many other issues have yet to be resolved. The state of Connecticut has a chance to join the march of progress by passing this legislation, and I urge you to vote for it.