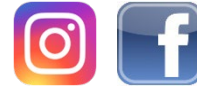




## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES

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(831) 454-4130 | [www.santacruzhumanservices.org](http://www.santacruzhumanservices.org)

RANDY MORRIS, DIRECTOR



# News Release

**Date:** July 9, 2024

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## FEDERAL PARDON TO LGBTQ+ VETERANS CONVICTED UNDER FORMER ARTICLE 125

### *Santa Cruz Veterans Service Office Can Help With Petitions, Benefits*

On June 26, 2024, President Biden issued a [pardon](#) to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ+) military service members who were forced out of the military and subject to a court-martial because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. While the federal government had already acted in 2014 to repeal Article 125, the Uniform Code of Military Justice article that criminalized certain acts of homosexuality, this new presidential pardon allows those veterans who were convicted under Article 125 prior to 2014 to apply for a certificate of pardon.

"Making sure all former service members, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can access the benefits and services earned and afforded them through their military services is our priority," says Dean Kaufman, Veterans Service Officer (VSO) for the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department. "This pardon makes it easier for us to do our job locally supporting LGBTQ+ former service members, and we feel confident that we can successfully assist anyone needing our help moving forward."

Those LGBTQ+ former military members affected by the pardon may seek assistance from the County's VSO for support applying for a certificate of pardon, which serves as the documented proof that their conviction has been erased. The local VSO can also support pardoned veterans to apply for an upgrade of military discharge, as well as to recover lost pay and benefits.

One such benefit critical to veterans regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is access to health benefits and medical services, including mental health support. "The timing of this news couldn't be better," says Kaufman, who wants to make sure local LGBTQ+ veterans become aware of an [LGBTQ+ Veteran Mental Health Webinar](#) hosted virtually by the Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Division of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) on July 10. The webinar will cover mental health during active duty, ongoing struggles after transitioning to civilian life, and available support services for LGBTQ+ veterans' well-being. "Our hope is the news of this presidential pardon not only helps LGBTQ+ veterans reach out for support if needed to apply for a pardon, but that it also motivates them to get engaged with webinar opportunities like this."

If you need assistance of any kind as a former service member of any identity, you can reach out to the County's Veterans Service Office for support:

<https://www.santacruzhumanservices.org/AdultLongTermCare/VeteransServices/ContactUs>

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