



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Servicemembers
Legal Defense Network Records

NMAH.AC.1282

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Servicemembers Legal Defense Network Records
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1282
Date:	1975-2009, undated (bulk 1993-2008)
Extent:	7.5 Cubic feet (23 boxes)
Creator:	Servicemembers Legal Defense Network
Language:	English
Summary:	This collection contains records and research material produced and collected by Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a lobbying and legal assistance organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender servicepersons. They were instrumental in overturning the United States Department of Defense's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This collection was donated by Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), 2012.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Collection, 1942-2012, undated (AC1146)

Processing Information

Processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archives specialist, May 2012; supervised by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network Records, 1877-2009 (bulk 1993-2008), undated, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

This collection is open for research.

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Biographical / Historical

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) is a non-profit founded in 1993 in the wake of the Clinton administration's efforts to make military service legal and non-discriminatory for openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons. The organization employs less than twenty persons and has a Board of Directors. SLDN provided legal services to LGBT servicemembers and was also a lobbying and policy organization. This initiative resulted in the passing of legislation commonly referred to as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) in December 1993. DADT prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual servicemembers or applicants while still barring openly homosexual or bisexual persons from military service. This policy proved controversial and continued to result in the discrimination and separation of LGBT persons from the military.

The original purpose of SLDN was working to overturn the DADT policy through legal or legislative means while providing free legal services to servicemembers targeted by DADT. Its scope of concern not only included active duty personnel but the National Guard, reserves, and officer training programs. On occasion it worked with other similarly focused organizations and directly with the Department of Defense and other relevant federal agencies. By the time of the repeal of DADT in September 2011 and its official enactment in January 2012, SLDN had provided legal aid to thousands of servicepersons.

In July 2012 SLDN announced that it was merging with OutServe, effective in October 2012. OutServe is an organization of active LGBT military servicepersons, reportedly one of the largest employee resource groups in the world. SLDN continues to provide free legal advice and assistance and also works with veteran organizations while maintaining a "watchdog" status on LGBT issues within the military establishment.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains correspondence, case files, legal briefs, subject files, research files, press releases, office records, clipping files, publications, and other material produced and collected by Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a lobbying and non-profit legal services organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender military servicepersons founded in the aftermath of the passage of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) legislation of December 1993. These records do not include material generated post 2009 and the final two years before the official overturning of DADT in September 2011. Before donation to the Archives Center, SLDN removed any material that they deemed sensitive, personal, or in violation of their client's privacy.

Correspondence contains that which was sent by SLDN and received by SLDN. Major correspondents were: the Executive Office of the President, members of Congress, officials of the Department of Defense and other defense related federal agencies, other similarly focused non-profit organizations as well as private citizens. Correspondence may also include petitions, correspondence with clients of SLDN, those seeking legal services and or statistics related to DADT and others. Case files are generally reference copies of cases filed by SLDN, individuals, or individuals with other organizations relating to LGBT treatment within the military. Case files contain most often the public record copy of the legal brief that was filed with the courts and any supporting or relevant documents. Legal briefs relate to cases filed by SLDN

or to the cases that in some way informed those legal cases and issues related to the mission of SLDN. Subject and research files were compiled from various sources and contain copies or original material produced in support of the SLDN mission with regard to legal actions or as a lobbying organization. Press releases are generally those produced by SLDN. Office records pertain to the day to day workings of the organization and inter-office memoranda and communication between employees or other organizations. Clipping files were compiled from a variety of national and international sources such as newspapers, magazines, and journals and used as reference tools within SLDN. Publications were those produced either by SLDN or collected by SLDN for research and reference purposes in-house.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into four series, one of which has been arranged further into subseries. The contents of each series or subseries are arranged chronologically. The series and subseries arrangement of the records is as follows:

Series 1, Administrative Records, 1994-2008

Series 2, Subject Files, 1980-2009 (bulk 1994-2009)

Subseries 1: Research Files, 1980-2008, undated

Subseries 2: Department of Defense, 1985-2003, undated

Subseries 3: United States Army, 1994-2005

Subseries 4: United States Navy, 1991-2008, undated

Subseries 5: United States Air Force, 1994-2004, undated

Subseries 6: United States Coast Guard, 1996-2005

Subseries 7: National Guard and Reserves, 2004

Series 3, Publications, 1988-2007

Series 4, Case Files, 1975-2008, undated

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

Researchers must handle unprotected photographs with gloves. As of October 2012 this collection is located at the Garber Facility, Building 19, Suitland, Maryland.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Activism

Air defenses -- United States

Air pilots
Armed Forces -- Operations other than war
Bisexuality
Civil rights
Civil rights -- United States
Courts-martial and courts of inquiry
Don't ask, don't tell (Military personnel policy)
Equality
Government and politics -- United States Congress actions
Homosexuality
Laws -- United States Congress actions
Lawsuits
Lesbianism
National defense
Sailors
Sexual harassment
Sodomy
Soldiers
Trials (Sex crimes)
U. S. Army
United States Air Force
United States Coast Guard
United States Department of Defense
United States Marine Corps
United States Navy -- 20th century
War
Women

Types of Materials:

Annual reports
Articles
Articles -- 1880-1940
Articles -- 1940-1980
Articles -- 1950-2000
Articles -- 20th century
Clippings -- 20th century
Clippings -- newspaper -- Virginia
Correspondence -- 20th century
Government records
Instructional materials
Interviews
Interviews -- 1990-2000
Interviews -- 2000-2020
Legal correspondence
Legal documents
Legal documents -- 20th century
Legal records
Legislation (legal concepts)
Legislative documents
Letters
Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.
Manuals -- 1970-1990
Newsletters -- 20th century

Office files
Periodicals
Project files
Research
Writings

Names:

Burton, Sala, Representative
Cohen, William S. (Secretary of Defense)
Cox Commission
Deutch, John M. (Undersecretary of Defense)
Frank, Barney, Representative
OutServe
Perry, William J., Secretary of Defense
Powell, Colin, General
Rumsfeld, Donald, Secretary of Defense
Studds, Gerry E. (Congressman)

Container Listing

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