



F R E E D O M T O S E R V E



*a five year blueprint for*



SERVICEMEMBERS LEGAL DEFENSE NETWORK



## A Vision.

*freedom to serve*

## A Mission.

SLDN is a national, non-profit legal services, watchdog and policy organization dedicated to ending discrimination against and harassment of military personnel affected by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* and related forms of intolerance.

## Goals for Freedom.

Lift the ban preventing gays, lesbians and bisexuals from serving openly and honestly in the military.

Provide free legal services to service members harmed by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* and related, discriminatory policies.

Protect service members from harassment based on perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

Advocate for policies and practices that improve the lives of service members.

Support service member and veteran pride as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender persons.

Strengthen organizational capacity to assure the freedom to serve in the most cost-effective, strategic fashion.

In 1993, a promise by Bill Clinton to lift the nation's ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual service members moved the issue of gay equality to the forefront of American politics.

The promise of our freedom to serve as full and equal citizens, however, met swift political opposition. Congress thwarted the President and codified into law *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. The law's sugarcoated name belies the reality that it continues to bar service by openly lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans.

Formed in the wake of the debate leading to *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) has the long-term vision to change the hearts and minds of Americans and to win us our freedom. This five-year blueprint marks a critical and exciting juncture as SLDN prepares to move to a second stage in our fight for equality.

From the very first day, we have worked tirelessly to provide free legal services to those harmed by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, to protect service members from harassment and to press for changes that improve service members' daily lives. We have succeeded. We have directly assisted thousands of service members, and obtained almost three dozen changes to military policy and practice, including an Executive Order on hate crimes in the military. Along the way, the American people have increasingly stood with us. In a recent Gallup poll, 72% of Americans support gays in the military, up from 53% ten years ago.

Today, with this plan, we build on our success with strategic programs designed to win our freedom to serve. We will educate Members of Congress, Pentagon officials and other decision makers about why *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* harms national security and offends basic notions of equality. We will build and electrify a grassroots movement that calls for lasting change in how our federal government treats us. And we will empower lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members and veterans through innovative communications and outreach strategies that bring their voices to the world.

In short, our blueprint builds upon a foundation which will lead to repeal of the last great wall of anti-gay discrimination in our country.

Our fight is about patriotism. It is about equal opportunity. It is about defending and realizing our collective vision of the freedom to serve.



a promise for freedom



"I would be proud to serve alongside you."

MG Vance Coleman, USA (Ret.), in comments made at the 2000 Millennium March on Washington.

*on the frontlines of freedom*

F R E E D O M T O S E R V E

No American is left untouched by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* or the courage of those who serve in its shadows.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual service members have served in every conflict since the American Revolution. Since World War II, however, our government has discharged more than 115,000 brave American service members who had been willing to die for our liberty, even while denied their own because of who they are.

Discrimination under *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* knows no age, gender, race or class. Women are discharged at twice their presence in the armed forces as they are accused of being lesbians in retaliation for reporting sexual harassment. Young men, aged 18 to 25, are at an especially high risk for anti-gay harassment, death threats and violence. The vast majority of those fired under *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* earn just \$12,000 - \$20,000 annually, many losing benefits to go to college. At the same time, our military has spent one-quarter billion taxpayer dollars replacing those fired under the current policy.

Bigotry undermines military readiness. Commanders should focus on missions, not bedrooms. Service members should be able to live honestly, not asked to deceive in an effort to uphold law.

One day, Congress will repeal *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. SLDN has the vision to make that day, and our freedom to serve, a reality.

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## Lift the ban preventing gays, lesbians and bisexuals from serving openly and honestly in the military.

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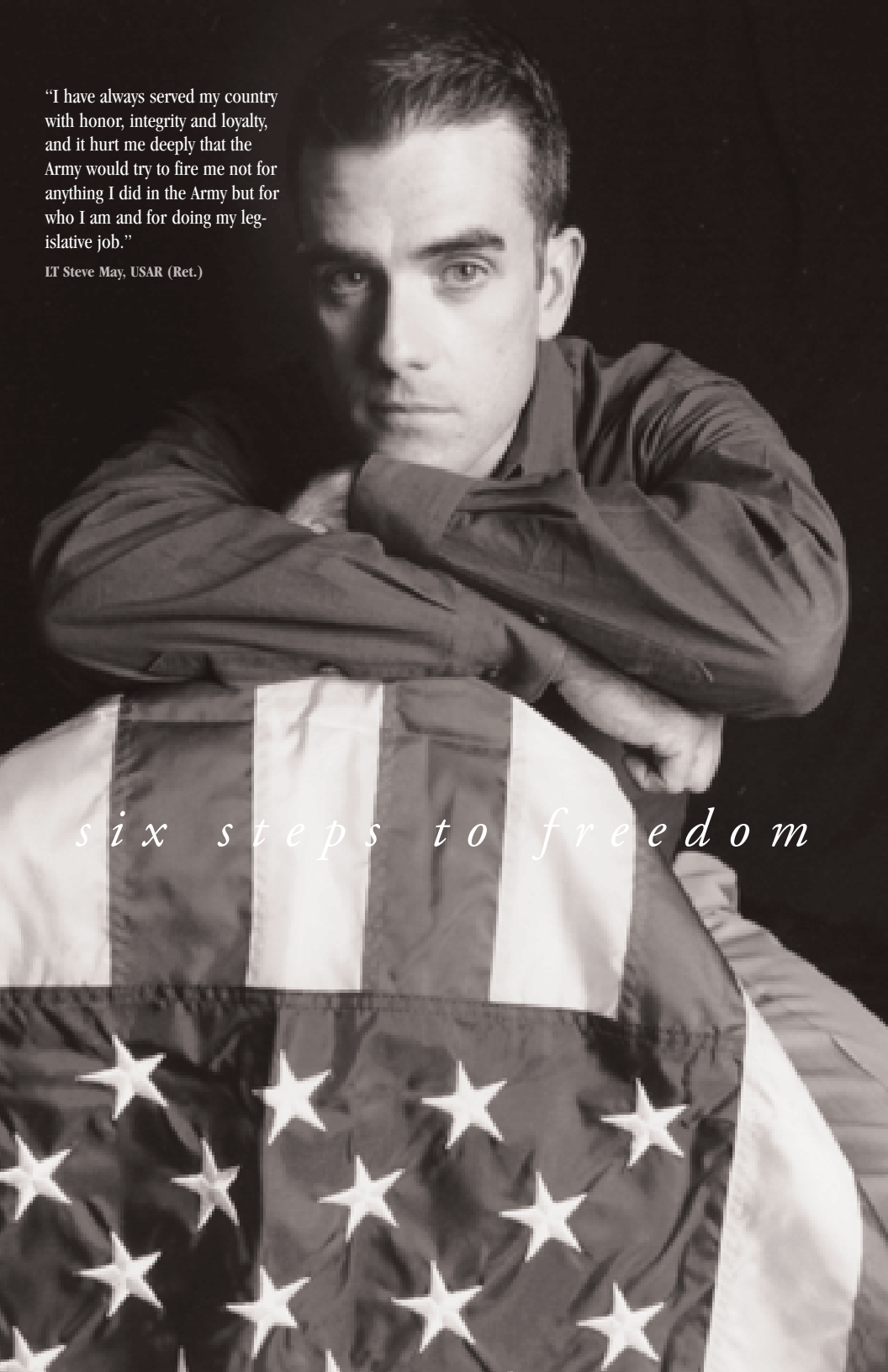
SLDN has always worked vigorously to repeal *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* and preserve opportunity for every American to defend the freedoms of our nation. In the next five years, SLDN will add the resources to:

- ★ Educate members of Congress, the Pentagon and other key decision makers about why *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* must fall.
- ★ Electrify a national grassroots movement to call for lasting change.
- ★ Mobilize our partners in equality from the civil rights, veterans and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.
- ★ Expand our innovative watchdog, media and outreach campaigns to create greater awareness of the dangers posed by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*.
- ★ Invest in advocacy and research to document and expose the dangers *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* poses to our national security.

*s i x s t e p s t o f r e e d o m*

"Many of the same arguments used against lesbian and gay service members were used against African Americans and women. I know that soon every American will be able to serve based upon our true merits: leadership, loyalty, ethics and discipline."

CPL Denise Liggett, USMC (1984-1988), Ensign, USNR (1989-1992)



“I have always served my country with honor, integrity and loyalty, and it hurt me deeply that the Army would try to fire me not for anything I did in the Army but for who I am and for doing my legislative job.”

LT Steve May, USAR (Ret.)

F R E E D O M T O S E R V E

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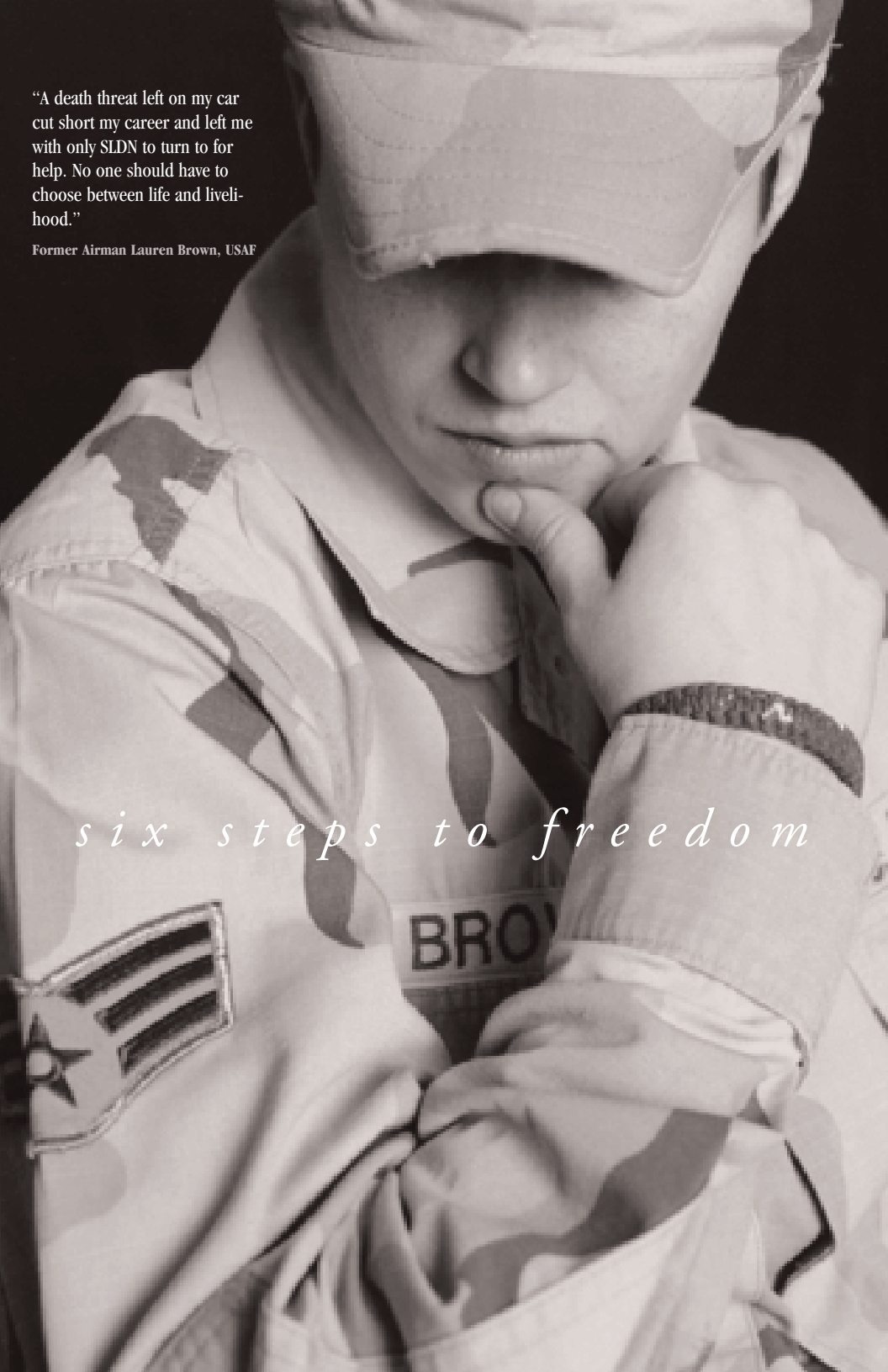
## Provide free legal services to service members harmed by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* and related discriminatory policies.

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Through the generous support of our members, SLDN has built an in-house legal team that provides a critical lifeline to our clients. Our assistance is always available to those harmed by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. And that is a promise we will keep despite a projected increase in calls for assistance of more than 100% over the next five years.

We always have – and always will – provide expert legal assistance for service members harmed by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*. For HIV-positive service members. And for transgender military personnel. Though HIV-positive and transgender military personnel are impacted by *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, they also face additional medical regulations that can be difficult to navigate.

We will never waiver in our commitment to the men and women who defend our freedoms.



“A death threat left on my car cut short my career and left me with only SLDN to turn to for help. No one should have to choose between life and livelihood.”

Former Airman Lauren Brown, USAF

s i x s t e p s t o f r e e d o m

F R E E D O M T O S E R V E

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## Protect service members from harassment based on perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender military personnel face constant harassment on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. We project that reports of harassment to SLDN will double in the next five years. Our response must be stronger than those who seek to undermine the physical safety of those who serve.

SLDN will aggressively pursue comprehensive anti-harassment policies that will change the military's culture. The keys are clear policy, effective training, accountability and committed leadership.

We will always work to ensure that:

- ★ *Every service member* is trained on the Pentagon's Anti-Harassment Action Plan adopted in 2000, and knows that harassment is unacceptable in all its forms.
- ★ *Every service member* who harasses or condones harassment faces accountability for his or her actions.
- ★ *Every service member* feels free to report harassment without fear of being discharged.
- ★ *Every service member* is able to report harassment through the same channels available for reporting racial and sexual harassment, including commanders, equal opportunity representatives, Inspectors General, and law enforcement officials.
- ★ *Every service member* can look to a military leader who assures the safety of all under his or her command.

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## Advocate for policies & practices that improve the lives of service members.

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SLDN has always been on the frontlines advocating for changes to military policy and practice that affect lesbian, gay and bisexual service members.

Our record includes three dozen changes to military policy and practice, including an Executive Order on hate crimes in the military and, with the leadership of Rep. Barney Frank, an Executive Order ending anti-gay discrimination in the issuance of security clearances.

Our journey, however, includes more stops on the march to equality:

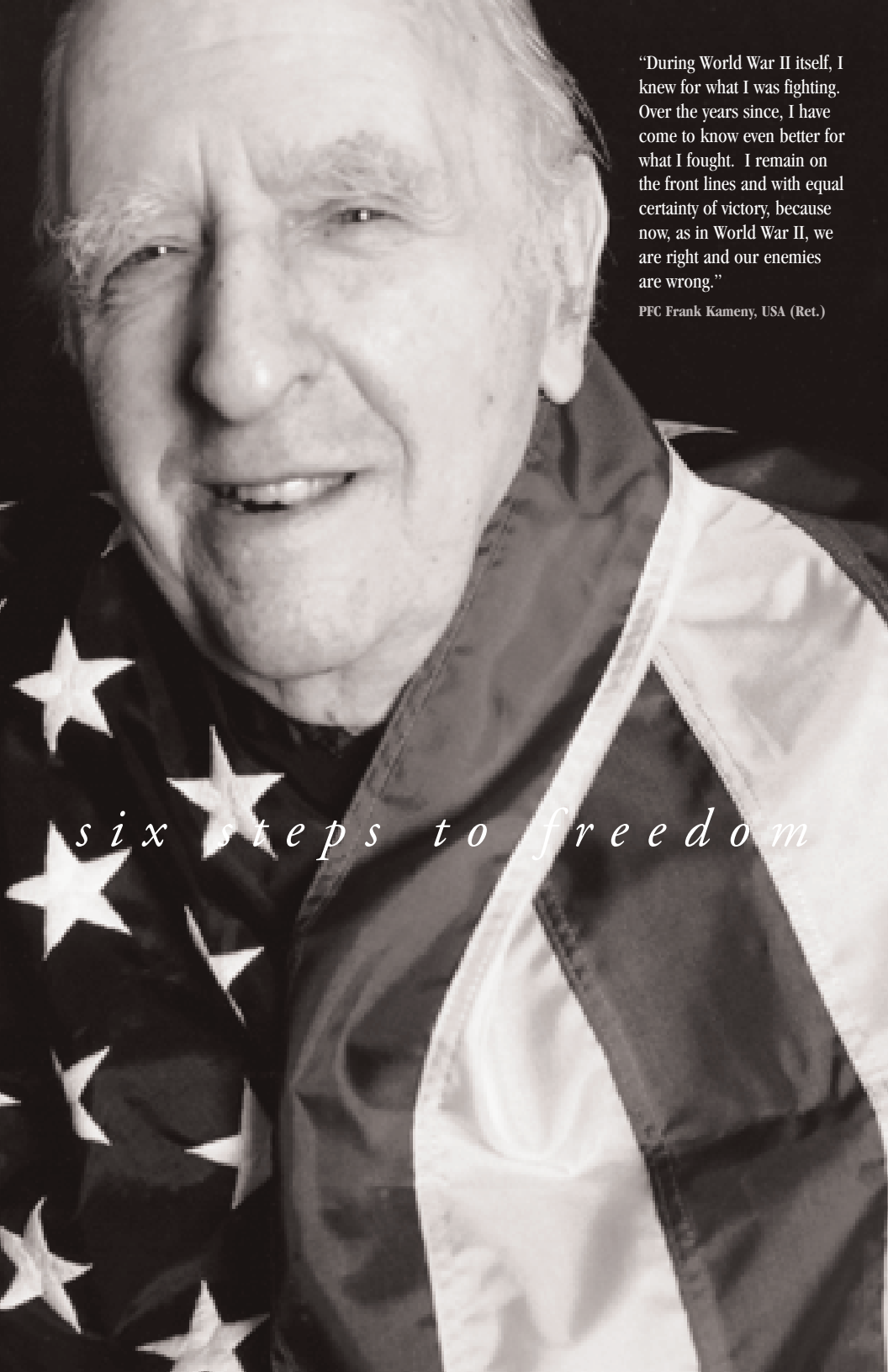
- ★ We will continue to fight for fair, accurate and comprehensive training programs that educate service members about the truth behind *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*.
- ★ We will demand that the Pentagon follow its own rules and hold accountable those who ask, pursue and harass service members, in clear violation of federal law.
- ★ We will demand a right to privacy for service members who discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity with family and friends.
- ★ We will obtain a psychotherapist privilege and doctor-patient privilege so that service members cannot face discharge for discussing their sexual orientation or gender identity with health care providers.
- ★ We will repeal the military's antiquated sodomy statute.
- ★ We will repeal the law forcing universities to abandon non-discrimination policies in favor of military recruiting.

*s i x s t e p s t o f r e e d o m*

"I've served as a surface warfare officer and aboard the USS Nicholson and the USS Miller, during Desert Storm and during times of peace. When my country asked me to go to war to defend another people against aggression in the name of freedom, I willingly went. No one loves the Navy or our nation more than I do."

Paula M. Neira, RN, CEN, Esq., USNA '85 LT, USNR, 1981-1991





“During World War II itself, I knew for what I was fighting. Over the years since, I have come to know even better for what I fought. I remain on the front lines and with equal certainty of victory, because now, as in World War II, we are right and our enemies are wrong.”

PFC Frank Kameny, USA (Ret.)

*six steps to freedom*

F R E E D O M T O S E R V E

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## Support service member & veteran pride as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender persons.

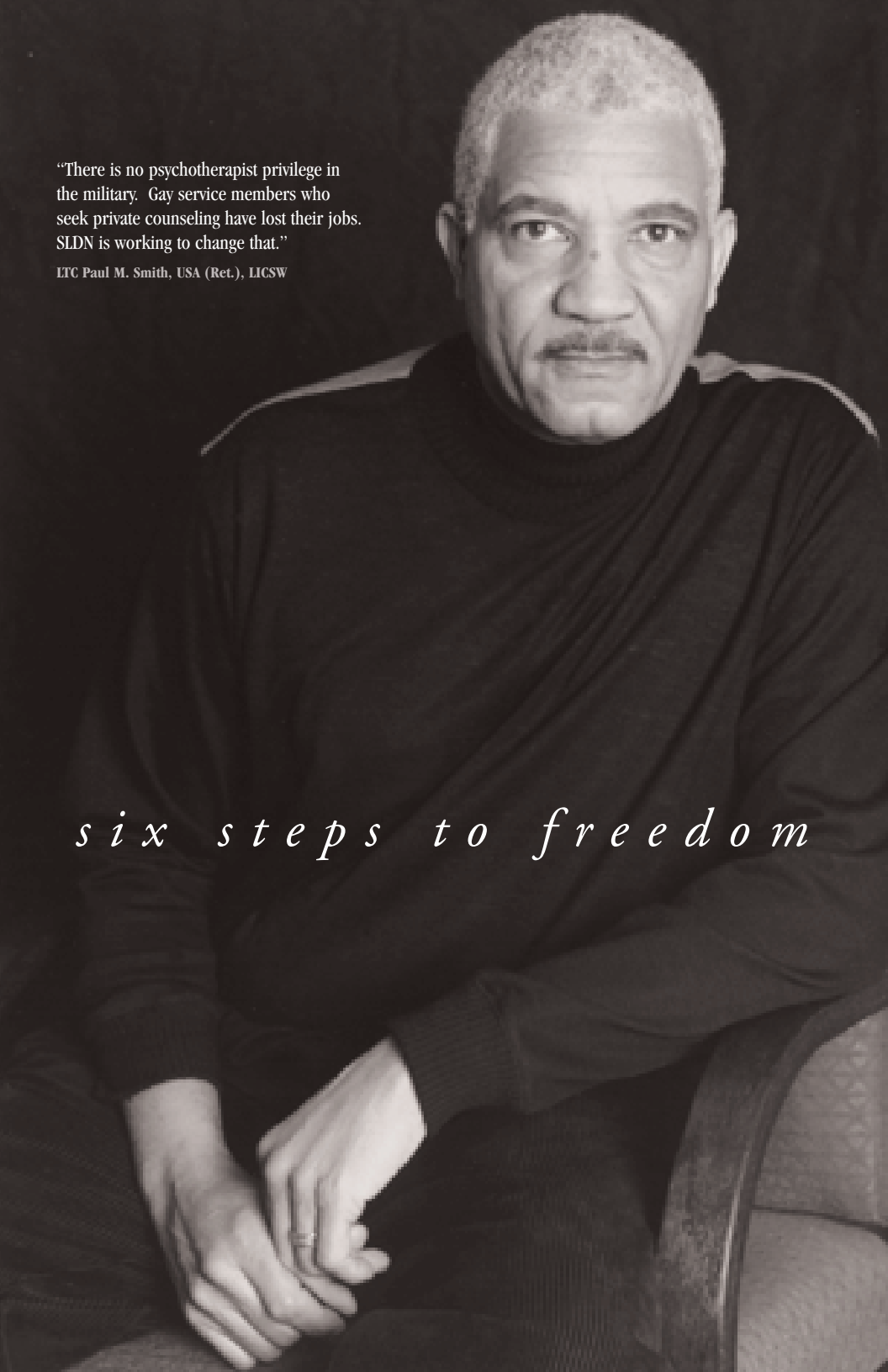
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Through a series of new outreach and communications programs over the next five years, SLDN will increase the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members and veterans. They have important, and inspiring, stories to share. Their voices pave the path to freedom.

- ★ SLDN will create online communities of out and proud veterans.
- ★ SLDN will establish grassroots communities, along with our allies, of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members and veterans.
- ★ SLDN will recognize the contributions of veterans and service members who have defended our freedoms in enforced silence through public events and speaking.
- ★ And, SLDN will erode the barriers that prevent the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members and veterans.

While on active duty, these brave patriots must keep their sexual orientation and gender identity an absolute secret, or risk discharge. After returning to civilian life, however, too many remain silent about their military service. We want to send a clear message that we are proud of their service and their contributions to our nation.

The freedom to serve means the freedom to be proud of who you are, and your service to our nation.



“There is no psychotherapist privilege in the military. Gay service members who seek private counseling have lost their jobs. SLDN is working to change that.”

LTC Paul M. Smith, USA (Ret.), LICSW

*s i x s t e p s t o f r e e d o m*

F R E E D O M T O S E R V E

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**Strengthen organizational capacity**  
to assure the freedom to serve in the most cost-effective,  
strategic fashion.

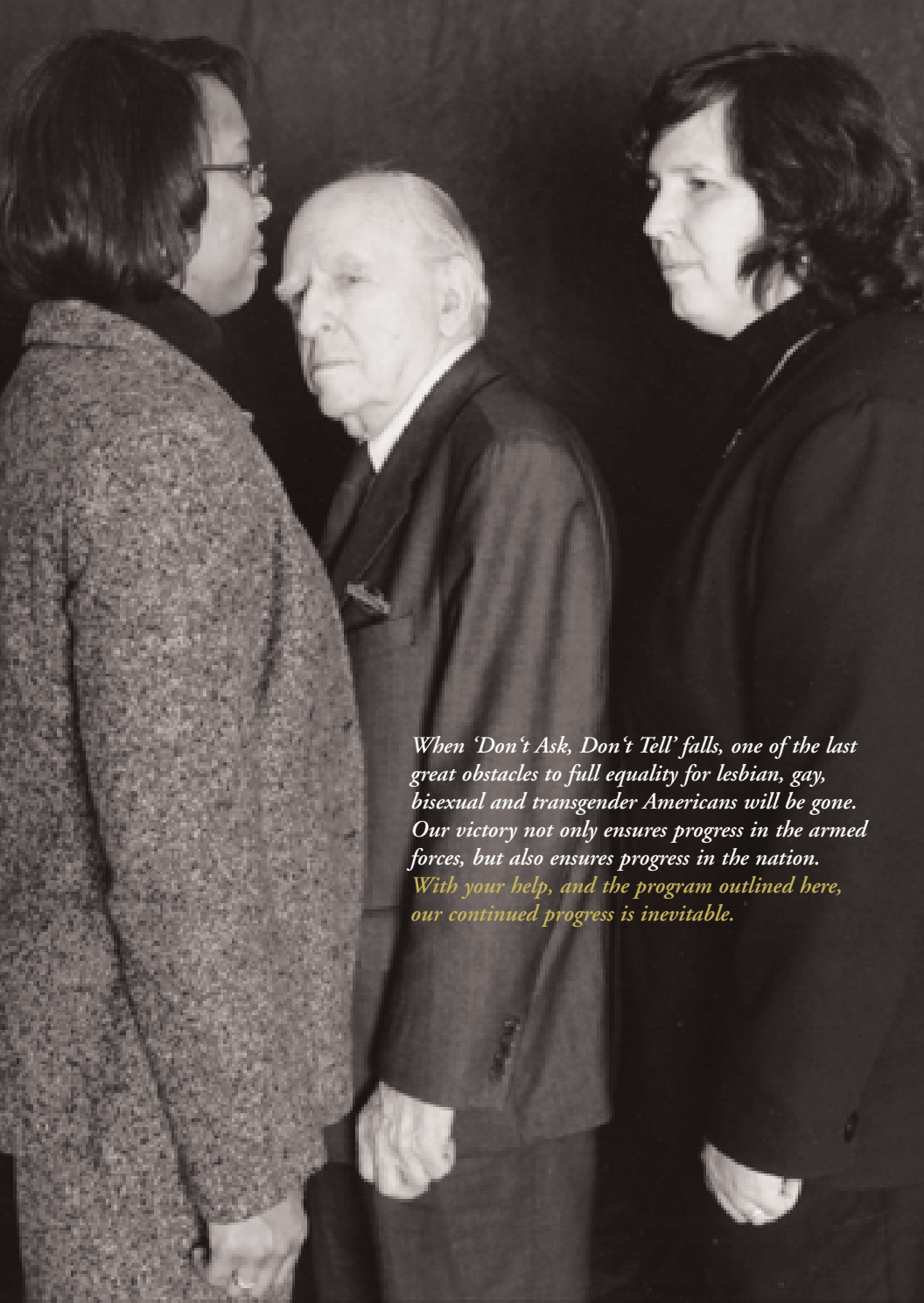
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The freedom to serve is assured by the unwavering commitment of the men and women who are SLDN.

In a decade's time, our blueprint for victory will be a memorial to the determination and dedication of those who seek to eradicate prejudice and move us toward freedom.

- ★ Through the continued, generous support of our members, SLDN will double our financial strength in five years.
- ★ We will always assure the highest return on our donors' social investment. And we will maintain the highest standards of ethics and fiscal responsibility.
- ★ We also pledge to recruit and retain the best and brightest staff, board of directors and volunteers. Our combined talents, including in the legal, military and advocacy arena, assure our victory.

SLDN will always be the voice of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patriots. With continued support from those who fight alongside us, the freedom to serve will become a reality.



*When 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' falls, one of the last great obstacles to full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans will be gone. Our victory not only ensures progress in the armed forces, but also ensures progress in the nation. With your help, and the program outlined here, our continued progress is inevitable.*

SERVICEMEMBERS LEGAL DEFENSE NETWORK

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