

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

Today's Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* represents another historic moment in our nation's civil rights history. Our highest court has affirmed that all Americans have the right to marry the person they love, regardless of their sexual orientation or where they live. Consistent with the court's ruling, I urge you to immediately grant all Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits to same-sex couples regardless of their state of residence.

As you know, despite the Supreme Court's decision in *U.S. v. Windsor*, the VA has remained unable to provide full federal benefits to gay veterans and their spouses living in states that previously did not recognize same-sex marriage. As a result, veterans with identical service records, disability ratings, and family size have received different benefits based on where they live and whom they love. This clear inequity has not only been an affront to thousands of men and women who have served our nation faithfully in uniform, it has also offended the basic principles of equality and fairness that are the foundation of our legal system.

Today's decision by the Supreme Court affirmed what many of us have long argued: the Constitution guarantees a right to marry to all couples regardless of their sexual orientation or state of residence. The Court's affirmation reflects not only overwhelming public opinion in support of gay rights, but also the position of many in the Executive and Legislative branches of government as well. In March, 57 Senators voted in favor of extending veterans and Social Security benefits to all eligible same-sex couples, regardless of their state of residency. Our nation, along with each of its branches of government, has given clear direction that same-sex couples should enjoy equal protection under the law, which should include all appropriate federal benefits.

That is why I am urging the VA to act as quickly as possible to implement the spirit of the Court's decision, and ensure that all veterans' benefits are awarded to eligible same-sex families. We have an opportunity to finally honor the service of so many men and woman who have fought to protect the very same freedoms they are now denied as civilians, including my friend Charlie Morgan.

I look forward to your response, and I thank you for your service to our nation.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator