



DISPLAY

LIT hosts Pride event, nears team milestone



Published June 20, 2023

Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

ARLINGTON, Va. (AFNS) -- The Department of the Air Force LGBTQ+ Initiative Team (LIT) hosted a gathering of Airmen, Guardians and senior leaders June 8 in honor of Pride Month.

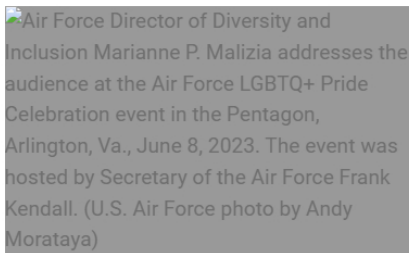
The theme of the event was "Pride forever, count us in." The master of ceremonies and LIT chair, Col. Mark Wernersbach, explained the message behind the theme.

"'Pride Forever' represents what we already know," Wernersbach said. "Gay and lesbian service members have been serving our nation since the beginning and will continue to do so. 'Count us in' stands for our growing team as we near 1,000 members. That's nearly 1,000 LGBTQ+ Airmen, Guardians and allies that are out there trying to make a change."

The LIT barrier analysis working group was formed in April 2021 to help identify and solve issues impacting inclusion of LGBTQ+ Airmen and Guardians in DAF. Since the creation of the team, it has raised awareness, informed medical policies, and advocated on behalf of LGBTQ+ military members and civilian employees.

The afternoon event had an optimistic tone and featured remarks from **Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Hon. Alex Wagner** and **Department of the Air Force Director of Diversity and Inclusion Hon. Marianne P. Malizia**.

Malizia kicked off the speaker series with compliments to the LIT on its remarkable growth in two years.

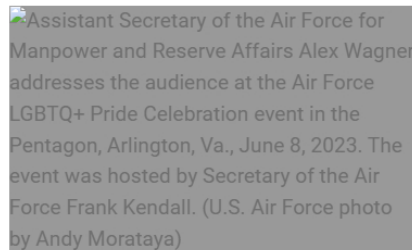


"The [LIT are] committed to doing the good work, identifying barriers to recruitment and retention, but more importantly, identifying ways to overcome those barriers for LGBTQ+ Airmen, Guardians, and family members," Malizia said.

She went on to highlight key steps for DAF members to learn to be more inclusive.

"I encourage all of us to continue to learn more about people of different identities and backgrounds," said Malizia. "Ask respectful questions, ask how you can find opportunities to expand your ways of thinking and broaden your perspectives."

Wagner shared a policy-focused perspective and highlighted progress that has dismantled barriers to service and increased quality of life for all service members.



"It was a year ago today that the department **updated its policies** for individuals who have been identified as HIV positive, asymptomatic and have undetectable viral loads," said Wanger. "As a result of revised policy, they no longer have any restrictions on deployability or their ability to commission as an officer, nor will such individuals be discharged or separated solely based on their HIV positive status."

Wagner also connected the far-reaching benefits of recently announced DOD initiatives and

wagner also connected the far-reaching benefits of recently announced DOD initiatives and their impact on LGBTQ+ families, including **12 weeks of parental leave, reproductive health policies**, and expanded data collection efforts.

He emphasized his commitment to ensuring that the dependents of Airmen and Guardians are safe and can thrive: "I want all military affiliated LGBTQ kids to know that we have your back. I have your back," Wagner said.

Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall hosts the Department of the Air Force LGBTQ+ Pride Celebration event in the Pentagon, Arlington, Va., June 8, 2023. The DAF's LGBTQ+ Initiative Team celebrated their team's growth as membership approached 1,000. (U.S. Air Force photo by Andy Morataya)

Kendall also expressed a new take on the contemporary term 'woke' and the need for empathy.

"I have my own interpretation," said Kendall. "I think being woke is about having empathy. It's about understanding people who aren't like you, and appreciating them for who they are, and valuing them."

Kendall closed by thanking the LIT and recognizing them for their achievements.

"We need to get to know each other, we need to work together," said Kendall. "We appreciate each other, value each other and treat each other with respect. I want to thank the LIT for the work they've done. It has been enormously helpful. Keep doing it; the fight's not over."



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