

Good afternoon.

My name is Captain Alivia Stehlik. Since I was a kid, playing on my dad's tanks while he was a company commander, I've wanted to be in the Army. I followed his footsteps, graduating from the United States Military Academy in 2008 as an infantry officer. During my 6 years in the infantry, I earned my ranger tab and my expert infantry badge. I also discovered I had a passion not just for the Army, but also for taking care of Soldiers.

I decided to become an Army physical therapist because I believed that Soldiers deserve medical providers who have walked in their shoes, and I have. I was accepted into the program and graduated in 2016. I was assigned as a staff physical therapist at Fort Carson, Colorado. A year later, I heard that a brigade would be deploying to Afghanistan, and that their physical therapist couldn't go due to her pregnancy. I volunteered to take her place.

Despite my desire to be part of an infantry unit again, I had some concerns. I had excelled as an infantry officer. I performed at a high level, was a team player, and always received top marks from my commanders, but something wasn't quite right. I never quite fit in. In 2017, I took steps to change the situation and began my transition. Given that my profession now is one in which I physically touch every person with whom I interact I was concerned that transition would be a problem; that I might be less effective if people were uncomfortable around me. There is no way to be a good physical therapist at a distance.

I say this because it brings us to the crux of today's hearing: what is the value of having transgender people in the military? Based on my experience as a combat arms officer and medical provider, the answer is unequivocally that my transition and those of so many others has dramatically increased the readiness and lethality of every branch of the Armed Forces.

I remained mentally, emotionally, and physiologically stable throughout my transition. I had only been "out," and on HRT, for 6 months when I attended my branch's captain's career course. Per regulation, I passed the PT test on male standards, was a distinguished honor graduate (#8/107), and was asked to come back and teach as a guest instructor.

Did I make people uncomfortable? No. On the deployment to Afghanistan as a transgender woman, Soldiers opened up. They talked to me, and told me things they would never have before. I asked them why, and the consistent answer was that they valued my authenticity, my courage in being myself. And while I was concerned that my presence might feel invasive to other women, at every turn they welcomed me into their lives and living spaces with open arms. I was part of their family.

I was the physical therapist for the entire eastern region of Afghanistan where I treated over 1700 patients. My care resulted in a less than 1% medical evacuation rate for musculoskeletal injuries. I'm proud of that, and it's clear that my presence in Afghanistan dramatically improved the readiness of my brigade. But more than the numbers, I'm proud that my Soldiers trusted me and knew that I would go out of my way to take care of them. Soldiers matter to me, and it's Soldiers who will miss out on medical providers and leaders like me if a ban on transgender service members goes back into place.

I returned to the United States just over a month ago. Today, I am a more effective Soldier, officer, and therapist having gone through transition. I belong in a combat arms unit, taking care of my Soldiers. I worked tirelessly to ensure that nothing could jeopardize that. It might be tempting to say that I am the exception, but that's simply not true. Transgender service members around the world have done the same thing – add to the readiness and lethality of the United States Military.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.