

[Time for New York City to stand against anti-veteran bias](#)

By [Kristen L. Rouse](#)

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I always appreciate hearing “Thank you for your service” when people learn that I served three tours with the US Army in Afghanistan. It’s something that past generations of veterans rarely or never heard.

Yet important as this is, we New Yorkers still have much work to do to ensure that veterans and those still serving in the military aren’t just appreciated, but also protected from discrimination here at home.

New York City's human-rights law is among the most progressive in the country, taking a stand against discrimination by age, citizenship, color, disability, gender, gender identity, marital or partnership status, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion or sexual orientation. It also prohibits employment discrimination based on arrest or incarceration record, caregiver status or credit history.

But as inclusive as we are, right now we're still failing to protect veterans and military members.

My organization, the NYC Veterans Alliance, hears often from veterans and their family members in the city about the discrimination they've faced. Landlords deny housing to veterans and their families, refusing to accept educational, disability or pension payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs as legitimate income.

Or worse, veterans are wrongly assumed to have psychological problems that landlords and employers will want to steer clear of.

Reservists and National Guard members — who make up 40 percent of today's armed forces — aren't hired by employers concerned they'll be called to active service, or they return to a job from military duty to lose seniority or be otherwise penalized for balancing their military duties with their jobs. Our veterans sacrifice to serve our nation; discrimination here at home simply feels like betrayal.

On April 26, the City Council will hold a hearing on Intro. 1259, which would rectify this by adding veteran and military status (summarized as "uniformed service") to New York's human-rights law. Federal and state protections already exist for veteran and military status, but this inclusion would be a powerful statement that our local leaders will work to end this discrimination.

Boston, Chicago, Miami and Seattle are already ahead of New York in recognizing the need to protect veteran and military members at the city level. Let's urge the mayor and City Council to catch up to these cities and prove that in New York, veterans and military members are wanted and welcome — and protected.

Kristen L. Rouse is the founding director of the NYC Veterans Alliance.