

Matt Thorn departing as OutServe-SLDN President & CEO; Andy Blevins appointed new Executive Director

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WASHINGTON, DC – OutServe-SLDN President and CEO Matt Thorn, leader of the nation’s premiere advocacy organization for LGBTQ servicemembers, veterans and their families, today announced that he will be stepping down from his position. Under Thorn’s tenure, OutServe-SLDN has enhanced its robust legal and advocacy presence and introduced extensive education and veteran services programming. Matt will be succeeded by Andy Blevins, who currently serves as OutServe-SLDN’s Vice President of Operations & Strategy.

“It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the President & CEO of OutServe-SLDN over the last four years. I have made the decision that now is the right time to step down,” **said Matt Thorn, the outgoing President & CEO of OutServe-SLDN.** “I could not be prouder of where the organization is today. We have dramatically increased our programmatic efforts while simultaneously suing the Trump Administration over their bigoted and unwise decisions to ban transgender service members and their “Deploy or Get Out” policies which adversely affect service members living with HIV. I believe I have completed what I was asked to do in first joining the organization nearly four years ago. OutServe-SLDN is ready for its next chapter and I am thrilled the Board has selected Andy Blevins to be my successor.”

“Matt Thorn has been an extraordinary leader and strong voice for OutServe-SLDN and the courageous LGBT servicemembers they advocate for on a daily basis,” **said Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi.** “I thank him for his service and look forward to working with Andy Blevins as he assumes this leadership role during a pivotal time for our LGBT servicemembers and their families.”

Under Matt’s tenure, OutServe-SLDN solidified partnerships with over 40 organizations and created a robust network of pro-bono partners resulting in the access and assistance to legal services for over 2,000 individuals and over \$4 million worth of legal services in the last four years. OutServe-SLDN created a new partnership with Strive Health, which will provide clinical services on an outpatient basis for service members, veterans and their families, ensuring that those seeking services are able to see a provider within 24-hours of contact. OutServe-SLDN will also be providing ongoing cultural competency training for all of Strive Health’s staff.

The organization also assisted in the implementation of open transgender service and vigorously advocated for the confirmation of Eric Fanning to be Secretary of the Army. OutServe-SLDN also held three well-received national conferences during this time, highlighting the expanding agenda and accomplishments of the organization. The organization provided amicus briefs cited by two Supreme Court Justices, Anthony Kennedy in the *Obergefell vs. Hodges* marriage equality case and Sonia Sotomayor in *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. Under Thorn’s leadership, OutServe-SLDN also created OutServe Knowledge Online which brings critical information to our members and the public through events and by creating an online repository of information and resources specific to the LGBTQ military community. Thorn also expanded the Board of Directors from seven to fifteen members adding new diversity and experience beyond the military to the Board.

“It has been an absolute and distinguished pleasure working with Matt Thorn these last four years,” **said Dr. Wesley Reynolds, Co-Chair of the OutServe-SLDN Board of Directors.** “On behalf of the organization’s Board and staff, we extend our deepest appreciation to Matt for his steadfast dedication to our LGBTQ servicemembers and veterans. We look forward to building upon the momentum Matt created and to continuing to expand our legal services and programming under Andy’s leadership.”

Andy Blevins, a Navy veteran and spouse of a transgender Army veteran, first started with the organization as both a client of SLDN and a Founding Chapter Leader in OutServe. He has since served in various capacities, including as a member of the national conference and legal teams and on the Board of Directors for the Military Partners and Families Coalition, which merged with OutServe-SLDN earlier this year. Prior to joining OutServe-SLDN's staff in 2015, Blevins worked with a boutique law firm specializing in veteran disability law, clerked for the Oregon Department of Justice, and served in the Obama White House. Blevins studied law and business administration at Willamette University and writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado. Outside of his professional commitments, Blevins has served as a City Commissioner and the Vice Chairman for human rights and relations in Oregon's capital city, on the executive board of the Oregon State Bar's military and veteran law section, and as a co-founder and the Editor-in-Chief for the Pacific Northwest's premier law journal focused on social justice and equity issues.

"We have accomplished a great deal under Matt's tenure at the helm of this organization and I am humbled and honored that the Board has selected me as his successor," **said Andy Blevins, the incoming Executive Director of OutServe-SLDN.** "Over the last several years, an increasing percentage of our all-volunteer military force has publicly identified as a member of the LGBTQ community. These individuals are selflessly devoted to this nation and should be afforded the right to carry out that service under open and authentic conditions, without fear of reprisal. As OutServe-SLDN's Executive Director, I look forward to standing alongside my siblings-in-arms and demanding that our military forces be a conduit of change for society, precipitating the guarantee of equal treatment and just protections for all members of the LGBTQ community."

"Having known Andy Blevins for nearly a decade, I can attest that there is no person more dedicated to the pursuit of equitable justice for our LGBTQ military and veteran communities," says **Jeff Mueller, Co-Chair of OutServe-SLDN's Board of Directors.** "Under Matt's direction, the organization has helped to secure tremendous progress for our members. We look forward to maintaining those changes and further advocating for open and authentic service for all as Andy takes the organization's helm."

Matt Thorn will depart this fall after a focused transition period working alongside Blevins. Blevins' appointment as Executive Director takes effect on December 1, 2018.

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