

Will Pentagon Give Benefits to Gay Military Spouses?

The Pentagon could decide this week whether to extend more of the benefits offered to spouses of heterosexuals to those of gay personnel, a U.S. official said on Tuesday.

Gay personnel are currently not able to obtain military benefits such as health care for their spouses, or the larger housing allowances granted to married couples, even though the ban on gays serving openly in the armed forces was lifted in September 2011.

Gay spouses also cannot obtain military identification cards like those given to heterosexuals, a restriction that limits their access to military bases and the services offered there, from child care to shopping.

The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Pentagon had still to decide which benefits could be extended to gay spouses without violating the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which only recognizes marriages between men and women. But he said a decision could be reached this week.

Pentagon spokesmen declined comment on the issue after the Washington Post reported that a decision had been made and would be announced later in the week.

One Pentagon spokeswoman said the Defense Department had been reviewing benefit issues since the lifting of the ban on gays serving openly in 2011.

"The department is conducting a deliberative and comprehensive review of the possibility of extending eligibility for benefits, when legally permitted, to same-sex domestic partners," Commander Leslie Hull-Ryde said in an email.

She said some benefits were currently extended to the spouses of gay and lesbian service members. These are known as “member-designated” benefits, where the service member is allowed to designate any beneficiary, such as the recipient of a life insurance payment, or a flag if the service member has died.

Reporting By David Alexander; Editing by David Brunnstrom.

© 2013 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.