

TN CIVIL RIGHTS NEWSLETTER

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TN CRAC Chair **Katherine Brewer**

Fiscal Year 2023 Quarterly Civil Rights Advisory Committee Meetings

- 1st Quarter Meeting will be on November 16-17 in Knoxville
- 2nd Quarter Meeting will be on February 1-2 in McMinnville
- 3rd Quarter Meeting will be on May 17-18 in Nashville
- 4th Quarter Meeting will be on August 16-17 in Jackson

You are invited to join us to present a topic or just to see how the committee operates. If you would like to attend, contact Katherine Brewer at Katherine.Brewer@usda.gov with your supervisor's approval. We look forward to seeing you there!

There are many things to look forward to as fall approaches, but it also marks the close of another fiscal year which inevitably means we will be saying good-bye to a few of our members. I would like to thank all our dedicated members once again, but most especially those whose time has come to an end. We greatly appreciate your service, and your efforts will not soon be forgotten.

First, I would like to thank Melissa Oliver, for serving as a General Member since fiscal year 2019. During her time on the committee Melissa served as a member of the Recruitment Subcommittee and lead of the Membership Subcommittee. Her input on how the CRAC can better facilitate the Field Office Civil Rights reviews will continue to be very important as we look toward updating that process.

I would also like to thank Leslie Honicker who has also been serving since 2019 as a General Member. She participated on both the Communications Subcommittee and as the lead of the Membership Subcommittee preceding Melissa. Among many other things Leslie helped navigate our switch to virtual Field Office Civil Rights Reviews when we had to adapt to the challenges of COVID.

Finally, I would like to thank Adam Daugherty for serving as the Asian American and Pacific Islander Emphasis Program Manager since fiscal year 2020. Additionally, he served as the lead of the Recruitment Subcommittee and as a member of the By-Laws and Performance Elements Subcommittee. Adam's work to improve our recruitment efforts lead to new resources and tools which we will continue to use for many years.

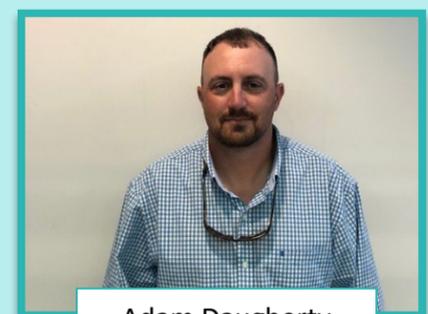
Your service on the CRAC is greatly appreciated!



Melissa Oliver



Leslie Honicker



Adam Daugherty

Hispanic Heritage Month

September 15- October 15

Submitted by Dre Funk, TN Hispanic SEPM

Unidos: Inclusivity for a Stronger Nation

Welcome to Hispanic Heritage Month! This year's theme is "Unidos: Inclusivity for a Stronger Nation," a statement to bolster that all voices deserve to be heard and when every voice is heard, we become a stronger community. This year's theme winner Ily Soares had this to say as the meaning behind her contribution:

"Hispanics in the United States are a diverse group who bring a rich combination of language, culture, educational backgrounds, and experience to the great American experiment. This diverse background brings with it a wealth of ideas and perspectives... We call on citizens of this nation from all walks of life to look around and welcome new voices to the table. This will help us build stronger communities and in turn, a stronger nation."

To read the full press release behind this year's theme release, please visit the National Council of HEPMs link below:

[Announcements \(nationalcouncilhepm.org\)](https://nationalcouncilhepm.org)



Accompanying this year's theme is the winning poster by Irene Matos Chan (seen above), highlighting the beautiful tropical climates and the names of 20 countries rooted in Hispanic/Latino/Latinx American heritage all together as one fabric. The artist submitted the image along with the following statement:

"I am biracial and I wanted to represent my Hispanic culture and the Hispanic countries. I want people to connect to their Hispanic culture and show it and express it to their community. [The poster] expresses that you should be proud of your race no matter what it is, and be proud to show it and represent it."

To read the full press release behind this year's poster release, please visit the National Council of HEPMs link below:

[Themes & Posters \(nationalcouncilhepm.org\)](https://nationalcouncilhepm.org)

Hechos Para Ti:

- ❖ 18% of the U.S. population is Hispanic as of 2019- making it the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the country *via Living Facts*
- ❖ The sector with the highest concentration of Hispanic workers is farming, fishing, and forestry at 43.4% *via Bureau Labor of Statistics*

Want to be a member?

The mission of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE) is to motivate and mentor members for leadership roles to assist NRCS and partners in delivering natural resources conservation. Our vision is to work in harmony with our partners in natural resources conservation.

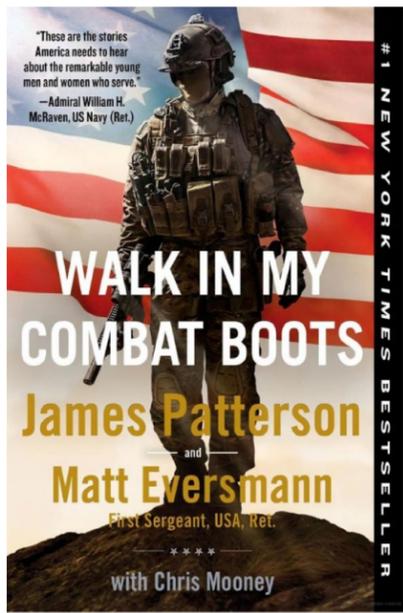
National Organization of Professional Hispanic
Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees

Follow this link for more information:

<https://nophnrcse.org/>

Veteran SEPM Update

Submitted by Elizabeth Bezinque, TN Veterans SEPM



I wanted to take a moment to provide some information on some upcoming events from the National Veteran Special Emphasis Program Manager Charles Thomas (acting).

Currently in the works are plans for a film screening, the creation of both a book club and a monthly Lunch and Learn series.

The Lunch and Learn is scheduled to begin in January and will be conducted monthly through Teams. This will be a meet and greet opportunity for networking within the FPAC mission area.

The book club will begin with [Walk in My Combat Boots: True Stories from America's Bravest Warriors](#) collected by James Patterson and 1SG (Ret.) Matt Eversmann. 100 copies of this book will be provided through FPAC. Details on the availability and meeting time are still to be determined.

The film [Terra Firma](#) is scheduled for screening in November. This documentary follows the story of three female veterans finding strength through the Farmer Veteran Coalition, using agriculture to combat the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

If you are interested in participating in any of the above-mentioned activities, please reach out to me at Elizabeth.Bezinque@USDA.gov or my direct line at 731-418-6111

What The PACT Act Can Mean For You

President Biden has signed the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. This Act expands the number of conditions attributed to burn pit exposures and extends the period of enrollment with the VA Health care to ten years post-discharge.

Named in honor of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, a decorated combat medic who died from a rare form of lung cancer, this historic legislation will help deliver more timely benefits and services to more than 5 million veterans—across all generations—who may have been impacted by toxic exposures while serving our country. Danielle Robinson, the widow of Sergeant First Class Robinson, was a guest of the First Lady at President Biden's [first State of the Union address](#) when he called on Congress to pass a law to make sure veterans devastated by toxic exposures – like her husband – finally get the health care and benefits they deserve.

The PACT Act will bring these changes:

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- Adds more than 20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures
- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation
- Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care
- Helps us improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures

If you're a Veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits. Call the VA benefit line at 800-698-2411, reach out to your VA caseworker about VA Form 21-526EZ, or log into your VA.gov account to start your application. Clicking the Start your Application button will declare your intent to file. You have 1 year from the day you submit your intent to file to complete your application.

Additional information can be found:

[PACT Act and your VA benefits](#)

[PACT Act White House Fact Sheet](#)

From June 2007 to December 2020, over **13,000** veterans filed a disability benefit claim for a burn pit related condition.

Less than **3,000** of these claims were granted.

 1,000 veterans disability claims denied

 1,000 veterans disability claims granted



Source: Democrats on House Committee on Veteran's Affairs



Source: House Committee on Veteran's Affairs

LGBTQ+ History Month

Submitted by Lauren Carter, LGBTQI+ SEPM

LGBT History Month is coming up in which we commemorate the milestones surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. October was dedicated in 1994 by Rodney Wilson, a high school history teacher from Missouri, originally as a call to action to promote LGBT equality. Our country has made such profound progress over the last 30 years that we now highlight different LGBT role models every day of the month. October was specifically selected because it coincides with National Coming Out Day on Oct. 11th and the anniversary of Washington's first ever LGBT civil rights march in 1979. The month also features Spirit Day on Oct. 20th, Ally Week in which we show support for the LGBT community, and the anniversary of 21-year-old Matthew Shepard's murder on Oct. 12th. His death led to the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009. Please don't forget to celebrate with us in October as we recognize the progress our country has made surrounding human rights and equality!

Information from University of Central Florida 2021: <https://www.ucf.edu/news/why-do-we-celebrate-pride-month-in-june-and-lgbt-history-month-in-october/>



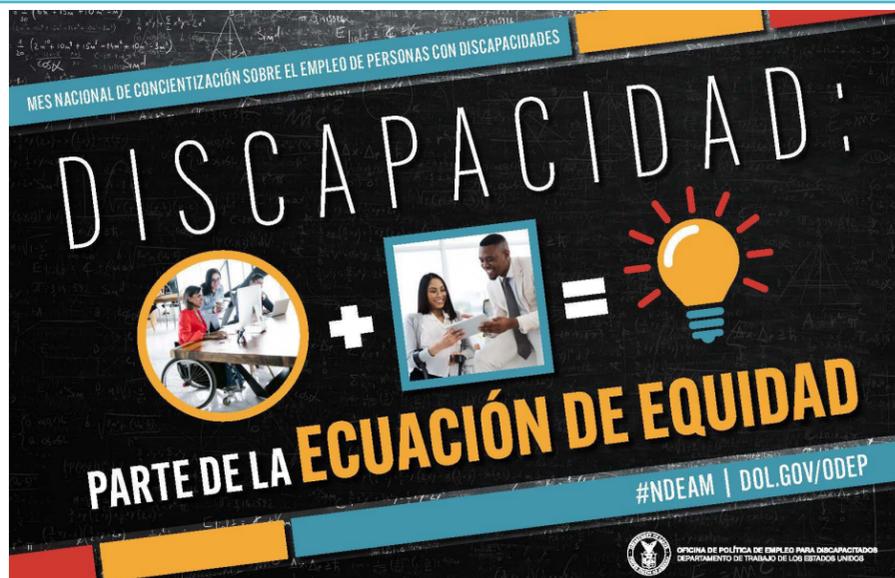
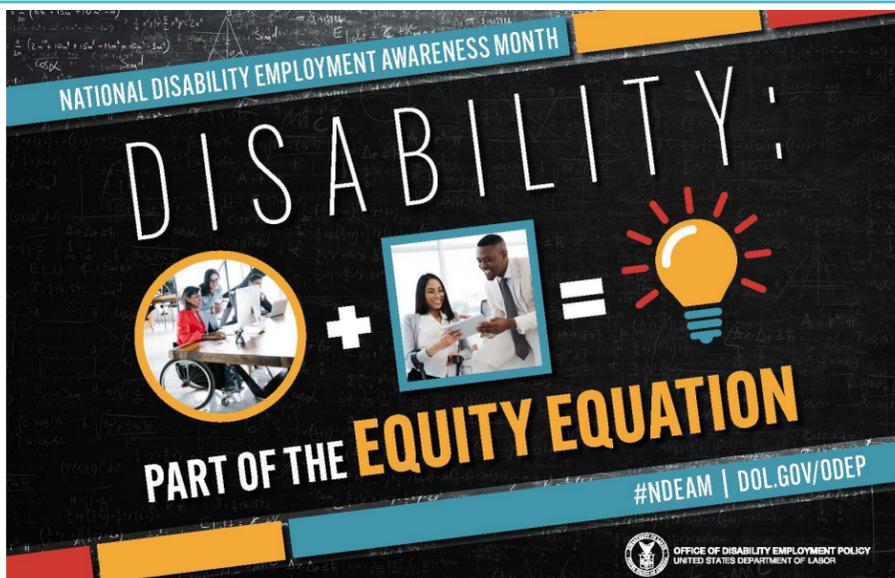
Photo from: <https://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/march1979a.html>

National Disability Employment Awareness Month – Poster Update

Submitted by Tammy Swihart, TN Disability SEPM

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and this year's theme is "Disability: Part of the Equity Equation." In honor of this year's theme two new posters were released in both English and Spanish to reach a wider audience on the importance of equity in the workplace. If you would like more information about this year's National Disability Employment Awareness Month, please visit the following website:

<http://dol.gov/odep>



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