

Agents of Change

TransActivist Rabbah Rona Matlow

Lieutenant Commander,
U.S. Navy, 1979-2001



"My mother, before she died, said to me she didn't really understand this whole business of my being trans, but she was my mother, and she was never going to turn her back on me, and she didn't understand how any mother ever could. But I have dealt with so many kids whose parents have rejected them. You know, the largest percentage of homeless kids are queer kids whose parents would rather see them dead than queer."

Self-described as "the only nuclear-qualified, transgender rabbi" in the United States, Rona Matlow was born in Arcadia, California, in 1959. After serving 22 years in the Navy, she retired in 2001, at the rank of Lieutenant Commander. In 2003, she entered the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York as a rabbinical student and was ordained as a rabbi in 2009. Due to injuries suffered during her military service, she has not been able to lead her own congregation, but has worked with The Soldier's Project to provide free counseling to veterans and Trans Lifeline to help transgender people in crisis. In 2015, she became aware of her gender dysphoria and, after discussions with her wife and family, began to transition to living full time as a woman. As an expert on transgender, military, and religious issues, she has spoken about transgender/religious law intersections, and is active as an advocate for the transgender community.



In the Navy and at home; protesting in Olympia; testifying before the State Department of Health.

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