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Congressmen ask DoD to issue stronger religious liberty instructions

WASHINGTON — The Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, an organization of chaplain endorsers--the faith groups that provide chaplains for the U.S. military--are commending Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah) and Rep. John Fleming, (R-La.) for their recent [joint letter](#) to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel regarding religious liberty protections for service members.

The letter asks the department to issue stronger instructions on religious liberty protections than it issued in January so that they conform more fully to religious liberty protections passed by Congress and signed by President Obama as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014.

“No American, especially those who defend our liberties, should be denied their God given, constitutionally protected religious liberties,” said Chaplain (COL) Ron Crews, USAR retired, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty. “Sen. Lee and Dr. Fleming have been champions of religious freedom for military chaplains and those they serve. The language they offered that became part of the 2014 NDAA provides real conscience protection for our men and women in uniform that the DoD should not ignore.”

That language requires the DoD to consult with those who endorse chaplains and to report to Congress. The DoD issued guidance on Jan. 22 but failed to consult with chaplain endorsers. Further, the guidance focused very narrowly on accommodation for specific clothing or jewelry displayed by a service member while failing to address the larger issue of censorship of religious speech.

The Department of Defense needs to provide clear guidance to the field that service members are allowed to speak about issues of faith without fear of recrimination,” said Crews. “We continue to receive reports of chaplains and other service members being challenged and in some cases disciplined for speaking out about their faith.”

As an example, Crews related the story of one chaplain who was told he had to provide his sermon and notes to a supervisory chaplain because the sermon was deemed “controversial.” After the chaplain’s endorser became involved, the supervisory chaplain backed down on his request.

The Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty is an organization of chaplain endorsers, the faith groups that provide chaplains for the U.S. military and other agencies needing chaplains. The endorsers in the Chaplain Alliance speak for more than 2,600 chaplains serving the Armed Forces.

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