

**Testimony of  
Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director  
American Humanist Association  
Before the  
House Armed Services Committee  
Subcommittee on Military Personnel  
Hearing on Military Religious Freedom  
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Davis, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the American Humanist Association concerning the state of religious freedom in the military. We are encouraged by the recent news that the Army is permitting humanism to be used as a stated religious preference, and other changes in the military give us hope that the plight of humanists and other nontheists will soon be fully addressed. We were also pleased by the fact that so many congressional offices, especially those that sit on the House Armed Services Committee, sent representatives to attend a crucial congressional briefing on the need for humanist chaplains in the military, which is something that I will address today.

The American Humanist Association is an educational organization that strives to bring about a progressive society where being good without gods is an accepted way to live life. We are accomplishing this through our defense of civil liberties and secular governance, by our outreach to the growing number of people without traditional religious faith, and through a continued refinement and advancement of the humanist worldview. Humanism encompasses a variety of nontheistic views (atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, naturalism, secularism, and so forth) while adding the important element of a comprehensive worldview and set of positive ethical values---values that are grounded in reason, empathy, and driven by a desire to meet the needs of people in the here and now.

Our military is a diverse institution, with servicemembers coming from a variety of backgrounds and holding a variety of beliefs. While some assume that the military is uniformly religious, the *2012 MAAF Department of Defense Religious Preference and Chaplain Support Study* showed that over 13,000 active duty personnel identify as atheists or humanists, and that nontheist soldiers outnumber all non-Christian faiths, including Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, in the military. Additionally, over 276,000 service members also identify as having no religious preference.

Unfortunately, humanist servicemembers are often subject to religious proselytization, and find their own needs being ignored by a military administration that is apathetic towards

the struggles of these men and women. Many of these humanistic servicemembers have faced discrimination at the hands of their fellow soldiers or even their superiors, and the refusal by the Chaplain Corps to allow for humanist chaplains means that these servicemembers don't have the same options in times of need as their religious counterparts. Essentially, the religious freedom of these soldiers is being jeopardized by the refusal of several institutions within the military to grant humanists the same rights and resources that theistic soldiers currently enjoy.

Allowing for the appointment of humanist chaplains would go a long way to addressing religious freedom concerns raised by humanist servicemembers. Humanist chaplains can provide vital resources and services to the sizeable nontheistic and humanist community in the armed services, and theistic chaplains would be better equipped to deal with the needs of nontheistic soldiers because of the information and resources provided to the Chaplaincy by humanist chaplains. Additionally, those nontheistic soldiers that feel uncomfortable going to a military psychologist because the meeting appears on their military record could speak in confidence with a humanist chaplain, as those meetings would be fully confidential and would not reflect negatively on a soldier's record.

It is also important to note that humanist chaplains are committed to serving all soldiers, including those who hold different religious beliefs. This means humanist chaplains would be expected to have prayer books and would be required to guide others in prayers according to their own religious traditions. In addition, an endorsing agency already exists for humanist chaplains. The Humanist Society, which was founded in 1939, prepares Humanist Celebrants to lead legal ceremonial observances in all 50 states and maintains programs to certify humanist chaplains and humanist Lay Leaders.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, the American Humanist Association believes strongly that the United States government should do everything it can to help our humanist and nontheistic servicemembers who put their lives on the line to defend the very same freedoms they wish to enjoy. We have a moral obligation to ensure that the needs of all soldiers are accounted for equally, and our current failure to do so may require congressional action to remedy the problem. To that end, we would strongly support your leadership in supporting legislation in the future like the Polis Amendment, which would allow for the appointment of humanist chaplains in the military, and we urge you to hold military leaders accountable for their failure to ensure that humanist servicemembers are being treated fairly. I thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.