



**Written Statement of the American Civil Liberties Union**

**Laura W. Murphy  
Director, Washington Legislative Office**

**Dena Sher  
Legislative Counsel**

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*Religious Accommodations in the Armed Services*

For nearly 100 years, the ACLU has been our nation’s guardian of liberty, working in courts, legislatures, and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and the laws of the United States guarantee everyone in this country. The ACLU takes up the toughest civil liberties cases and issues to defend all people from government abuse and overreach. With more than a million members, activists, and supporters, the ACLU is a nationwide organization that fights tirelessly in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C., for the principle that every individual’s rights must be protected equally under the law, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or national origin.

The goal of the ACLU’s work on freedom of religion and belief is to guarantee that all are free to follow and practice their faith, or no faith at all, without governmental influence or interference. Through litigation, public education, and advocacy, the ACLU promotes religious freedom and works to ensure that government neither prefers religion over non-religion, nor favors any one faith over others.

Religious freedom is one of our nation’s most cherished liberties. It includes two mutually reinforcing protections: the right to religious belief and expression, and a guarantee that the government neither promotes nor disparages religion or any particular faith. Because of these protections, we are all free to believe, or not believe, according to the dictates of our conscience. Just in the last decade, the ACLU has brought over 100 cases defending the rights of individuals to exercise their religious beliefs freely. While over half of these cases were brought on behalf of those who are Christians, our work in this area knows no preference.<sup>1</sup> The ACLU also advocates for laws that heighten protections for religious exercise.<sup>2</sup>

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to submit this statement for the hearing on “Religious Accommodations in the Armed Services.” The hearing will examine an important topic facing the military today—religious accommodation. Laws, policies, and regulations, including the recently revised “Accommodation of Religious Practices Within the Military Services,”<sup>3</sup> guarantee religious liberty for all service members, regardless of faith or belief and should allow for appropriate religious accommodations while protecting against discrimination.

### **Accommodation of Religious Beliefs in the Military**

The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees us the freedom to hold any belief we choose and the right to act on our religious beliefs, unless those actions harm others. This is true for all Americans—including service members.

Longstanding policies and regulations have provided guidance on how to carry out these constitutional protections.<sup>4</sup> Under these policies, people of different religious beliefs and none at

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<sup>1</sup> ACLU Defense of Religious Practice and Expression, <http://www.aclu.org/aclu-defense-religious-practice-and-expression>.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of legislation we have supported include the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000cc – cc-5, and the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, S. 3686 (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Dep’t of Defense Instruction 1300.17.

<sup>4</sup> One very straightforward and appropriate example is that “[s]ervice members can share their faith (evangelize), but must not force unwanted, intrusive attempts to convert others of any faith or no faith to one’s beliefs (proselytization).” *E.g.*, Dep’t of Defense, DOD Knowledge Base, “Are Service members permitted to freely

all, have served together in the military and treated one another with dignity and respect. They all share, and honorably uphold, their duty to protect and defend our nation.

In the FY 2013 and FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Acts, Congress weighed in on this issue, and the Department of Defense has set forth revised regulations in accordance with these statutes. Religious liberty—in the civilian and military context—has never been without limits, nor should it be. The recently enacted laws and revised regulations embody this constitutional reality: The revised regulations call for an accommodation unless it could have an adverse impact on mission accomplishment, including military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, discipline, health, and safety. This necessarily includes an assessment of whether any particular accommodation of religious belief or conscience could result in discrimination or harm to others.<sup>5</sup>

Implementation of these regulations, however, has not lived up to its promise. On one hand, some religious minorities continue to be denied an accommodation and the opportunity to volunteer to protect and defend our country.<sup>6</sup> When the regulations were revised, the Department of Defense stated it “places a high value on the rights of members of the military services to observe the tenets of their respective religions” and that the new regulations will “reduce instances and perception of discrimination.”<sup>7</sup> Yet the process seems stacked against those seeking accommodations. The regulations would require religiously observant service members and prospective service members to remove their head coverings, cut their hair, or shave their beards—a violation of their religious obligations—while their request to accommodate these same religious practices is pending.<sup>8</sup> This is so, even if they are otherwise qualified to serve and an accommodation is unlikely to undermine safety or other necessary objectives. Moreover, an accommodation, even when granted, is not valid for a service member’s entire commitment and must be resubmitted for a new assignment or transfer of duty station.<sup>9</sup> The uncertainty associated with this requirement to repeatedly request an accommodation for the very same religious practices is stifling, and may needlessly limit career opportunities—or, in some cases, end careers.

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practice their religious beliefs?”, *available at* [https://kb.defense.gov/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/720/~~/religious-proselytizing](https://kb.defense.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/720/~~/religious-proselytizing).

<sup>5</sup> See Dep’t of Defense Instruction 1300.17 §4.h. (requiring consideration of “the importance . . . of putting unit before self”); statement of Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen, to [www.factcheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org), May 2, 2013, <http://www.factcheck.org/2013/05/court-martialed-for-sharing-religious-faith/> (“We work to ensure that all service members are free to exercise their Constitutional right to practice their religion in a manner that is respectful of other individuals’ rights to follow their own belief systems; and in ways that are conducive to good order and discipline; and that do not detract from accomplishing the military mission.”)

<sup>6</sup> David Alexander, “Two U.S. Soldiers Lose Bid to Dress According to Religious Custom,” *Reuters*, Apr. 28, 2014, *available at* <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/28/us-usa-army-religion-idUSBREA3R1F320140428>.

<sup>7</sup> Pamela Constable, “Pentagon Clarifies Rules on Beards, Turbans for Muslim and Sikh Service Members,” *Wash. Post*, Jan. 22, 2014, *available at* [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/pentagon-clarifies-rules-on-beards-turbans-for-muslim-and-sikh-service-members/2014/01/22/13b1fc22-83a9-11e3-9dd4-e7278db80d86\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/pentagon-clarifies-rules-on-beards-turbans-for-muslim-and-sikh-service-members/2014/01/22/13b1fc22-83a9-11e3-9dd4-e7278db80d86_story.html).

<sup>8</sup> Dep’t of Defense Instruction 1300.17 §4.g.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, §4.j.

These aspects of the regulations serve as hurdles for some religious minorities to serve their country and will result in discrimination against them. Over 100 Members of Congress<sup>10</sup> and advocacy groups from across the spectrum<sup>11</sup> have asked the Department of Defense to make changes. And on November 12, 2014, the ACLU and UNITED SIKHS filed a lawsuit on behalf of a Sikh college student who wants to enlist in Army ROTC.<sup>12</sup> The student, Iknor Singh, has requested a religious exemption to wear his turban, beard, and long hair that would allow him to pursue his lifelong dream of serving in the Army.<sup>13</sup> Under the current regulations, the Army says it cannot grant Mr. Singh an accommodation until he enlists. But once he enlists, Mr. Singh will have to comply with Army grooming and dress standards “unless and until” an exemption is granted. The lawsuit argues that this Catch-22 as well as the refusal to accommodate Mr. Singh’s request violate the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which is applicable to the military and incorporated in the regulations. We urge the Department to revise the regulations to appropriately accommodate Mr. Singh and others like him who wish to serve.

On the other hand, there are reports that under this policy, service members have received accommodations and as a result, have refused to carry out responsibilities if doing so involves serving lesbian and gay service members and their families. This is just the sort of barrier from which the military should be free. No interpretation of policy should sanction discrimination.

Non-theists and the religiously unaffiliated, or “nones” continue to face discrimination, even though they are one of the largest (and growing) groups in the military.<sup>14</sup> The Army should be commended for recently adding Humanism to the already long list of religious-preference designations, but it is troubling that the request took years to fulfill.<sup>15</sup> And last year, the Air Force changed its policy to require airmen taking the oath of enlistment or reenlistment to conclude the oath with the phrase, “so help me God.”<sup>16</sup> This policy change has since been reversed, but it is alarming that this unconstitutional and discriminatory policy change was made in the first place.

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Members of Congress to Sec’y of Def. Chuck Hagel, Mar. 10, 2014, [http://sikhcoalition.org/images/documents/letter\\_to\\_secretary\\_hagel\\_re\\_sikh\\_american\\_service.pdf](http://sikhcoalition.org/images/documents/letter_to_secretary_hagel_re_sikh_american_service.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Religious Liberty Advocacy Groups to Acting Under Sec’y of Def. for Pers. & Readiness Jessica L. Wright, Apr. 2, 2014, [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/assets/2014-04-02\\_-\\_faith\\_letter\\_concerning\\_dodi\\_130017.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/assets/2014-04-02_-_faith_letter_concerning_dodi_130017.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> *Singh v. McHugh*, No. 1:14-cv-01906 (D.D.C. filed Nov. 12, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Iknor Singh, “The Army Is Making Me Choose Between My Faith and My Country,” *Huffington Post*, Nov. 12, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/iknoor-singh/sikh-army-rotc\\_b\\_6147686.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/iknoor-singh/sikh-army-rotc_b_6147686.html).

<sup>14</sup> See *Religious Diversity in the U.S. Military* (finding Humanists (which included atheists and agnostics) comprised 3.61% of service members and 25.5% of service members identified as having no religious preference, with higher numbers among younger service members); Defense Manpower Data Center, “Pay Grade and Religion of Active Duty Personnel by Service (no Coast Guard)” (2009), [http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/Personnel\\_and\\_Personnel\\_Readiness/Personnel/09-F-1173ActiveDuty\\_Religion\\_andPayGrade\\_byService\\_as\\_of\\_May\\_31\\_09.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/Personnel_and_Personnel_Readiness/Personnel/09-F-1173ActiveDuty_Religion_andPayGrade_byService_as_of_May_31_09.pdf) (showing a larger number of atheists and agnostics than all those who listed minority faiths and all but a few Christian denominations; those identifying no religious preference constituted 20% of the total).

<sup>15</sup> Maj. Ray Bradley, “Army Humanists No Longer Invisible,” *ACLU Blog of Rights*, Apr. 22, 2014, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/religion-belief/army-humanists-no-longer-invisible>.

<sup>16</sup> Chris Carroll, “Air Force Seeks DOD Ruling on Re-enlistment Oath,” *Stars & Stripes*, Sept. 9, 2014, *available at* <http://www.stripes.com/news/us/air-force-seeks-dod-ruling-on-re-enlistment-oath-1.302225>.

We know it is possible for the military to do better because we have seen it address other religion-related problems proactively with positive policy changes. For example, the Air Force Academy responded to a report documenting an environment of religious intolerance and inappropriate proselytizing by working with outside experts to create a better environment.<sup>17</sup> The Academy implemented mandatory training for cadets on religious respect and established more inclusive worship spaces.<sup>18</sup>

## **Military Chaplains**

Religious freedom is a fundamental and defining feature of our national character. Given our robust, longstanding commitment to the freedom of religion and belief, it is no surprise that the United States is among the most religious, and religiously diverse, nations in the world. This is equally true in the Armed Forces. Department of Defense reports show that nearly one-third of all members of the Armed Forces identify as non-Christian.<sup>19</sup>

Military chaplains have two separate duties and attendant responsibilities. Chaplains must fulfill the duty to serve this religiously diverse population and must care for and facilitate the religious requirements of service members and their families who come from all faiths and none.<sup>20</sup> This is in addition to serving as members of the clergy for their faith groups. All denominations and faiths that sponsor military chaplains agree to provide chaplains who will honorably fulfill the office's dual responsibilities.<sup>21</sup>

Chaplains' free exercise rights are, of course, protected by the First Amendment and federal law.<sup>22</sup> Chaplains are not required to engage in practices that are contrary to their religious beliefs when performing their religious services. What this means for prayers, which have unfortunately become controversial over the years, is that chaplains may close prayers according to their specific faith traditions when performing their religious services. Moreover, they cannot be forced to violate their consciences in matters regarding their religious ministry and can refuse, for example, to perform prayers or marriage ceremonies that violate their religious beliefs.

But these protections do not give chaplains an affirmative right to ignore their other duties to serve all service members and their families equally. For more than two hundred years, military chaplains fostered a reputation for putting the needs of service members first. The trust in, and respect for, chaplains is based on the understanding that they will uphold their duty to serve

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Air Force, *The Report of the Headquarters Review Group Concerning the Religious Climate at the U.S. Air Force Academy* (June 22, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> *E.g.*, *2009/2010 Cadet & Perm Party Climate Assessment Survey*, U.S. Air Force Academy (Oct. 29, 2010) available at <http://www.usafa.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-101029-013.pdf>; Don Branum, "Academy Air Officers Commanding Conduct Religious Respect Training," *Academy Spirit*, Oct. 18, 2013, available at <http://www.usafa.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123367610>; Dan Elliott, "Air Force Academy Calls Its Religious Climate Improved," *Associated Press*, Dec. 17, 2009, available at [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2009/12/17/air\\_force\\_academy\\_calls\\_its\\_religious\\_climate\\_improved/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2009/12/17/air_force_academy_calls_its_religious_climate_improved/).

<sup>19</sup> *Religious Diversity in the U.S. Military*, Military Leadership Diversity Comm'n, Issue Paper No. 22 (June 2010).

<sup>20</sup> *E.g.*, Dep't of Defense Directive 1304.19, "Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Departments," § 4.2.

<sup>21</sup> *E.g.*, Dep't of Defense Instruction 1304.28, "Guidance for the Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Departments," § E.2.1.5.

<sup>22</sup> *E.g.*, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Pub. L. No. 112-239, § 533(b) (2013); National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-81, § 544 (2011).

fellow service members and avoid taking advantage of their role by interfering with the rights of those they serve.

In recent years, there have been attempts by some to interfere with chaplains' roles and responsibilities by suggesting that they should be allowed to proselytize and engage in sectarian prayer when carrying out their duty to care for and facilitate the religious requirements of all service members and their families. These proposed changes would put the desire of individual chaplains ahead of the interests, rights, and needs of those they are required to serve, demonstrating a lack of respect for service members and the diversity of religious beliefs in our military.

When chaplains are performing their religious services, they have an almost unlimited opportunity to pray according to their own consciences and faiths. Command functions, such as non-routine military ceremonies or events of special importance, are not, however, religious services. Commanders are constitutionally obligated to ensure that such functions are neutral with regard to religion and not used as an occasion to promote or disparage any religious belief. Service members attending non-voluntary events should not be forced to participate in sectarian prayers given by a chaplain.<sup>23</sup> Changes to chaplains' roles and responsibilities would interfere with commanders' obligation to ensure command functions are neutral with regard to religion.

Indeed, religious liberty is alive and well in this country precisely because our government cannot tell us how or even whether to worship. Permitting military chaplains to proselytize and conduct sectarian prayer at all times would, thus, harm religious liberty and violate the Constitution.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we strongly oppose Section 525 of the House-passed Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act.

Chaplains have the duty to serve everyone, even those of no faith.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is vital that chaplains be provided with the training and resources to enable them to serve everyone, including non-theists and the religiously unaffiliated, or "nones." In addition, because chaplains must advise the chain of command on matters of religious practice and accommodation,<sup>26</sup> they must be familiar with and thoroughly understand the belief systems of all service members they serve.

A second concern regarding chaplains is whether there is discrimination against chaplain candidates from minority religions and belief systems.<sup>27</sup> Currently the Armed Forces contract

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<sup>23</sup> See Statement of Rt. Rev. James B. Magness, Bishop Suffragan for the Armed Forces and Federal Ministries, The Episcopal Church, for the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Military Personnel hearing on "Religious Accommodation in the Armed Services," Jan. 29, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See generally Robert W. Tuttle and Ira C. Lupu, *Instruments of Accommodation: The Military Chaplaincy and the Establishment Clause*, 110 W. Va. L. Rev. 87 (2007).

<sup>25</sup> The newly revised Department of Defense Instruction 1300.17 §4.a. states, "The DoD places a high value on the rights of members of the Military Services to observe the tenets of their respective religion or *to observe no religion at all.*" (emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Dep't of Defense Directive 1304.19, § 4.1.

<sup>27</sup> The ACLU is concerned about the current structure of the chaplaincy itself, but broader reforms are outside the scope of this hearing.

for some chaplains and have no chaplains from some of the religions or beliefs.<sup>28</sup> The lack of diversity in the chaplain corps may affect how the free exercise needs of service members and their families are met. Ensuring that there is absolutely no discrimination based on animosity toward or lack of understanding of a candidate's faith or beliefs in the selection process is, therefore, of paramount importance.

### **Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Service Members and Their Families**

More than three years ago, the discriminatory “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was repealed. Prior to its repeal, many argued that ending DADT would somehow harm service members and weaken military readiness and unit cohesion. That has not come to pass. In 2012, General James Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, said repeal had not been an issue<sup>29</sup> and according to a study, authored by professors at the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, and U.S. Marine Corps War College, open service for lesbian, gay, and bisexual members of the Armed Forces “has had no overall negative impact on military readiness or its component dimensions, including cohesion, recruitment, retention, assaults, harassment or morale.”<sup>30</sup>

There were also dire predictions about the chaplain corps—that vast numbers of chaplains would leave the military. A 2012 article reported, however, that only two or three active-duty chaplains left in the wake of DADT repeal.<sup>31</sup>

In June 2013, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel recognized the important contributions of LGB service members:

Our nation has always benefited from the service of gay and lesbian soldiers, sailors, airmen, and coast guardsmen, and Marines. Now they can serve openly, with full honor, integrity and respect. This makes our military and our nation stronger, much stronger. The Department of Defense is very proud of its contributions to our nation's security. We're very proud of everything the gay and lesbian community have contributed and continue to contribute. With their service, we are moving closer to fulfilling the country's founding vision, that all of us are created equal.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For example, there is no chaplain representing nontheist belief systems. Chris Carroll, “Rejection Doesn’t Stop Campaign to Become Military’s 1st Humanist Chaplain,” *Stars & Stripes*, June 16, 2014, available at <http://www.stripes.com/news/rejection-doesn-t-stop-campaign-to-become-military-s-1st-humanist-chaplain-1.288769>.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., “Marines Must Live With ‘Good Enough’ As Budget Shrinks: Amos,” *Breaking Defense*, Aug. 28, 2012, <http://breakingdefense.com/2012/08/marines-must-live-with-good-enough-as-budget-shrinks-amos/>.

<sup>30</sup> *One Year Out: An Assessment of DADT Repeal’s Impact on Military Readiness*, Palm Center, Sept. 20, 2012, available at [http://www.palmcenter.org/files/One%20Year%20Out\\_0.pdf](http://www.palmcenter.org/files/One%20Year%20Out_0.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> David Crary, “Air Force Chaplains Adjust to Gays Serving Openly,” *Associated Press*, July 5, 2012, available at <http://www.standard.net/stories/2012/07/05/air-force-chaplains-adjust-gays-serving-openly>.

<sup>32</sup> Remarks by Secretary Hagel at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Month Event in the Pentagon Auditorium, June 15, 2013, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5262>.

In an August 13, 2013, memorandum, Secretary Hagel stated that “all spousal and family benefits . . . will be made available to same-sex spouses”<sup>33</sup> as required by the Supreme Court’s ruling striking down section three of the Defense of Marriage Act. In a memorandum from the same day, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jessica Wright explained that the “Department will work to make the same benefits available to all spouses, regardless of whether they are in same-sex or opposite-sex marriages.”<sup>34</sup>

An example of such a benefit is the counseling, relationship education, and skills training for married couples (such as Strong Bonds in the Army). These programs are chaplain-led on behalf of commanders in order to build relationship resiliency.<sup>35</sup> On September 5, 2013, the Chief of Chaplains of the Army issued guidance on implementation of the Strong Bonds program. Reiterating that the “Chaplain Corps upholds the Army Values and treats all Soldiers and Family Members with dignity and respect,” the guidance explained that “Soldiers and Family members may participate in Army programs without any restriction on the basis of sexual orientation, including Chaplain-led programs such as Strong Bonds.”<sup>36</sup>

Following the Department of Defense announcement that spousal benefits must be available equally, some chaplains’ endorsing organizations have prohibited their chaplains from facilitating this benefit for same-sex married couples. The Army guidance provides that if this happens, “the chaplain should coordinate with another chaplain or qualified individual who is conducting a Strong Bonds event that would include same-sex couples.”<sup>37</sup> There have been reports, however, that at one installation, no chaplains are able to conduct these events and that at other installations, couples have faced difficulty participating.<sup>38</sup>

Counseling and relationship education assist commanders in building individual resiliency and increasing readiness of individual service members and their families. Thus, it must be available to all service members and their families equally. If chaplains cannot or will not lead the programs, it is the obligation of the command to ensure that the programs are available to all couples who want to attend. The military should address this issue sooner rather than later to avoid problems and ensure that this important program, which contributes to readiness, is available to all service members and their families.

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<sup>33</sup> Sec’y of Defense, “Extending Benefits to the Same-Sex Spouses of Military Members,” Aug. 13, 2013, *available at* <http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2013/docs/Extending-Benefits-to-Same-Sex-Spouses-of-Military-Members.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Under Sec’y of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, “Further Guidance on Extending Benefits to Same-Sex Spouses of Military Members,” Aug. 13, 2013, *available at* <http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2013/docs/Further-Guidance-on-Extending-Benefits-to-Same-Sex-Spouses-of-Military-M.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> *E.g.*, Chaplain (LTC) Birch Carleton, “What Is Strong Bonds,” *Army News Service*, Dec. 16, 2010, [http://www.strongbonds.org/skins/strongbonds/display.aspx?CategoryID=425d7e3b-254f-4a3b-bfd6-bf574faa967a&ObjectID=87957844-3dbc-4b70-af49-b60faa74ccdc&Action=display\\_user\\_object&Mode=user&ModuleID=f6c229ca-03ae-4c81-8d0a-81a5a0c208f9](http://www.strongbonds.org/skins/strongbonds/display.aspx?CategoryID=425d7e3b-254f-4a3b-bfd6-bf574faa967a&ObjectID=87957844-3dbc-4b70-af49-b60faa74ccdc&Action=display_user_object&Mode=user&ModuleID=f6c229ca-03ae-4c81-8d0a-81a5a0c208f9).

<sup>36</sup> Army Chief of Chaplains, “Strong Bonds Events and Same-Sex Couples,” Sept. 5, 2013, *available at* <http://militaryatheists.org/news/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/OCCH-strongbonds-DOMA.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *E.g.*, Joe Gould, “Fort Irwin Backtracks on Denying Retreat for Same-Sex Couple,” *Army Times*, Nov. 22, 2013, *available at* <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20131122/NEWS/311220025/Fort-Irwin-backtracks-denying-retreat-same-sex-couple>.



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Religious freedom in the United States—including in the military—includes two protections: the right to religious belief and expression, and a guarantee that the government neither promotes nor disparages religion or any particular faith. Because of these protections, we are all free to believe, or not believe, according to the dictates of our conscience. We must guard against using these freedoms and protected beliefs for political gain. Rather, we should cherish and safeguard them.

Please contact Legislative Counsel Dena Sher, 202-715-0829, [dsher@aclu.org](mailto:dsher@aclu.org), for comment or questions.