

Military Culture Coalition

The Honorable Howard P. McKeon
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 22, 2012

Dear Chairman McKeon,

The undersigned leaders of the Military Culture Coalition are writing to thank you for your leadership in protecting rights of conscience and religious liberty in the armed forces, and for supporting enforcement of the Defense of Marriage Act in the military.

We also appreciate Speaker John Boehner's continued resolve to defend the DOMA in court, and the leadership of Rep. Tim Huelskamp and Rep. Todd Akin, who are sponsoring and supporting the Military Religious Freedom Protection Act, [HR 3828](#). As you know, the legislation would a) Protect the rights of both chaplains and people of faith in the military, and b) Reaffirm congressional support for traditional marriage in the military.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees rights of conscience and religious freedom to both chaplains and military personnel. However, Department of Defense policy statements clearly indicate that there is a need to deter *infringements* on religious liberty, which are likely to become more apparent as Pentagon officials continue to implement LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) law and related policies in the military.

Chaplains are relatively few in number, but their role is critically important in maintaining morale, discipline, and rights of conscience in the military. The U. S. Constitution established the chaplaincy to protect rights of religious expression among military personnel, even when troops are deployed far from home.

At the present time, a minority of chaplains who support LGBT law in the military may express their views regarding homosexual conduct at all times. But chaplains who represent the majority of faith traditions face career penalties for expressing sincerely held religious or moral beliefs on that issue in situations other than worship services. There are no conscience or religious freedom protections for chaplains and people of faith involved in activities such as the Army's "Strong Bonds" marriage counseling program, religious study groups, and social, educational, or family/athletic activities.

According to Army Tier One training instructions (Slide #11), the only option for chaplains who cannot reconcile their sincerely held religious views regarding homosexual conduct in settings other than worship is to relinquish their sponsoring agency's endorsement and seek "voluntary separation" and an honorable discharge if they owe no time to the Army. Such policies already are imposing a chilling effect that infringes rights of conscience and religious liberty in the armed forces.

We are also concerned about the administration's attempts to circumvent the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defines marriage as the bond between one man and one woman. In April 2011, the Navy Chief of Chaplains issued a memo calling for same-sex marriage training. Following strong opposition from Congressman Todd Akin and 61 colleagues, the Navy memo was suspended but not revoked.

In September 2011, the Pentagon issued [two policy memoranda](#) authorizing the use of military facilities for same-sex "ceremonies" or "functions" in states where they are not prohibited, but without official Defense Department endorsement or benefits.

Administration officials who provided to Congress repeated assurances that the Defense Department would comply with the Defense of Marriage Act did not mention that the Department of Justice was about to discontinue legal defense of the DOMA in court. This "bait and switch" situation, which broke faith with Congress and the military, is lending support to current and future litigation demanding extension of all marriage benefits to same-sex couples.

Thank you again for your recognition that elected representatives in Congress should have something to say about ongoing, still-unresolved controversies such as this.

We hope that you will do everything possible to protect constitutional rights of conscience and religious freedom in the military, and to reaffirm congressional intent with regard to same-sex marriages or "marriage-like ceremonies" on military bases.

Sincerely,

CC: The Hon. John Boehner
The Hon. Tim Huelskamp
The Hon. Todd Akin

The Undersigned - (All names for identification only)

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