



INTERFAITH ALLIANCE
OF TULSA
PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

General Mark A. Welsh III
Chief of Staff
United States Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670
June 9, 2014

Dear General Welsh,

I am writing on behalf of the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance to express our support for the language of AFI 1-1 as recommended by Mikey Weinstein and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

The Tulsa Interfaith Alliance is a non-partisan, faith-based advocacy group that works diligently to maintain the separation of church and state, to address issues of unconstitutional religious expression, and to raise awareness of the greater good that people of all faiths, and no faith, bring to society. Our work is directed toward the public square, not individual faith communities. Our Board of Directors is made up primarily of Christians, but we also have members from Jewish, agnostic, humanist and Buddhist traditions. Half of our Board, plus me, are ordained Christian clergy serving local congregations, denominational offices, and even one seminary professor. We speak as people of various faiths with mutual respect for one another's faith. From that perspective, we do not want anyone, especially our government, telling us what we must believe, what we can preach from our pulpits, or how we are to practice our personal faith.

Accordingly, the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance is strongly opposed to any governmental intrusion into the religious freedoms guaranteed under the 1st Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. It is our belief that some of the changes that have been proposed by others to this section of the AFI will lead to a weakening of this important constitutional guarantee.

We believe that those brave citizens who have chosen to put their lives at risk to defend that Constitution (and its Amendments) are entitled to the same freedom of religious thought and conviction as we who benefit from their sacrifices. We fully support the right of every service member to practice their faith (or lack thereof) in a constitutionally appropriate manner, just as we support and seek to defend that right for everyday citizens.

We understand that, in many ways, the Armed Services of the United States are vastly different from civilian workplaces. One of those ways in which the Armed Service is different is the extreme regard subordinates have for their superiors; a heightened respect and regard that is necessary for unit cohesion and morale. Just as in the civilian corporate environment, requiring superiors to be neutral about religious issues in front of their subordinates does not violate anyone's freedom of conscience. However, when those same superiors use their position of extreme authority in the Armed Forces to promote their personal religious beliefs, the free exercise rights of the subordinates are violated. Let us also remember that a superior officer in our Armed Forces is not acting as a private individual when addressing subordinates. Rather, that officer is acting as an official representative of the Armed Forces and, by extension, the government of the United States of America. When that officer shows

preference to one set of religious beliefs, it is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause of our Constitution.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the members of the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance, I urge your office to reject the proposed changes to AFI 1-1 and, as the Military Religious Freedom Foundation has recommended to you, leave intact the existing provisions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Lawrence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rev Bob Lawrence, MDiv
Executive Director