



REV. DR. C. WELTON GADDY  
President

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

June 10, 2014

Dear General Welsh,

On behalf of Interfaith Alliance, whose members represent more than seventy-five different faith traditions, I write to reaffirm my organization's support for the religious freedom protections promised by the current version of Air Force Policy Directive 1. We urge you to reject the proposed changes to this policy that have recently been reported by the media.

As both an ordained minister and a staunch defender of the First Amendment, I firmly believe that the freedom to express one's religious beliefs while also being free from religious coercion by others is central to America's promise of religious liberty. That promise must be embodied in every aspect of American life, and it must not be jeopardized for those who bravely serve in the United States Armed Forces.

The Air Force has faced serious criticism in this area for past practices that allowed a culture of coercion and intolerance toward religious minorities serving in its ranks. I have been proud to be part of many meetings over the last few years as the Air Force has sought to correct this problem, and I would hate to see that hard work undermined by this policy change. I strongly urge you not to reverse this progress by altering your current policy regarding religious expressions within the Air Force command structure.

Because the Air Force is a unique environment in which leaders have significant power and all members depend on the support of their comrades, the need to prevent even the appearance of coercion as it relates to religion is paramount. When a commander promotes a particular form of religious practice, his or her subordinates may not be able to distinguish between a display of belief and an implicit order to follow their lead. This likely scenario will not only threaten the religious freedom of those subordinates, it will be destructive to the cohesion and unity of the military. We ask the brave men and women of the Air Force and other branches of the military to give up so much, we cannot also ask them to give up their right to follow their own religious path with out interference – implicit or explicit – from their superiors.

Over the past several years I have deeply appreciated the Air Force's willingness to work with religious leaders like myself to help ensure the rights of all servicemen and women. I urge you to recommit to this important work by maintaining the current guidelines governing religious promotion by the Air Force command structure. If there is any way that I, or other religious leaders, can help you in protecting this policy, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy President, Interfaith Alliance



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