

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2026

The Honorable Peter Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write to express our concern about your announcement of unspecified [reductions](#) to the Department of Defense (DoD) Faith and Belief Codes, the withdrawal of the Army Spiritual Fitness Guide and your recent orders for Chaplains to remove their rank insignias from their uniforms in favor of religious insignia. We request additional information about these suspicious moves because we plan to ensure that DoD is not backsliding on its historic commitment to every service member's religious free exercise and freedom from religious coercion and government orthodoxy. It is not your job to promote a particular religious creed in the Department of Defense, but rather to protect all service members' constitutional rights and faithfully implement the law.

American service members put their lives on the line to defend our country and our Constitution. Each service member is in turn guaranteed their own First Amendment right to practice their religion—or no religion at all—as they see fit.

We are troubled that your actions signal a departure from decades of precedent protecting service members against undue restrictions on their personal religious practice while also exposing them to unwanted and taxpayer-funded religious proselytization. The Faith and Belief Codes and the nondenominational Army Spiritual Fitness Guide reflect a careful balance among the First Amendment's Free Exercise principle, its anti-Establishment command and its central protection for the freedom of speech and conscience.

The Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB) revised the current Faith and Belief Codes (the Codes) during the first Trump Administration in 2017. The Codes were initially developed pursuant to a law Congress passed nearly 15 years ago. A [bipartisan supermajority](#) included a provision in the Fiscal Year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act directing DoD to issue regulations protecting service members' conscience, moral principles, and religious beliefs. A comprehensive set of Faith and Belief Codes, which lists the broad array of service members' sincerely held faiths and beliefs, enhances personnel readiness and better equips the Army Chaplain Corps and commanding officers to support morale.

Reducing the Codes will complicate DoD's ability to safeguard the religious freedom rights of our nation's service members. These codes provide the Department with critical demographic data that informs military chaplains' work and the appropriate allocation of resources. Eliminating lesser-used codes, especially those reflecting nontraditional or no belief, will severely harm the very service members for whom these codes are most essential: members of

minority religious faiths and service members who are nonreligious and thus belong to the [fastest-growing bloc of citizens on the religious spectrum](#).

The composition of our military reflects our country's significant religious diversity. At least [one third](#) of the nation's service members identify as non-Christian or non-religious. Allowing service members to accurately identify their religious, spiritual, or nonreligious beliefs promotes an accurate understanding of our forces. The preexisting codes also simplified the process for service members to access institutional support and necessary accommodations for their beliefs.

Further, eliminating the Army Spiritual Fitness Guide (the Guide) produced by the Chaplain Corps undermines the authority and professional judgement of the Chaplain Corps you say you want to strengthen. The Guide was designed as part of the Army's Holistic Health and Fitness Program to be a practical tool for ensuring that anyone in a leadership position can tend to the spiritual fitness of everyone in their command. It is a useful mechanism to break down the stigma surrounding discussion of mental health, just as commanders are responsible for the physical fitness and nutrition of the service members under their command. Army Chaplains understand their role is not to proselytize, but to provide meaningful professional support in ways that are authentic to the service members who are receiving it, regardless of their religious or secular views.

That is also why your bizarre decision to bar Chaplains from displaying the ranks they have earned on their uniforms in favor of religious insignia is both baffling and troubling. Chaplains serve as moral anchors in the Armed Forces because they model inclusive leadership and service within a religiously and demographically diverse population. Your decision to ensure that Chaplains are instead solely identified by their religious affiliation indicates a troubling step towards allowing open proselytization within the nation's secular and professional armed forces—mirroring steps you have taken to convene prayer sessions during working hours and featuring your own pastor.

We are deeply troubled that your actions to replace the comprehensive Faith and Belief Codes with a mysterious and limited list, paired with your dismissal of the Spiritual Fitness Guide and new mandates for Chaplain Corps uniforms, depart from decades of precedent and constitute impositions on our service members' religious liberty.


To protect the religious freedom of U.S. service members guaranteed by the First Amendment, we respectfully request the following information:

1. Please share the full list of the newest Faith and Belief Codes.
2. Please share DoD's written justification for rescinding the longstanding Faith and Belief Codes. Please additionally describe the process DoD used to determine which codes would be removed from the Faith and Belief Codes updated during the first Trump Administration.
3. With these changes, how will the DoD protect the religious freedom rights of service members from minority faiths and belief backgrounds, including humanists and non-religious service members?
4. How will the DoD protect all service members' access to the benefits of working with chaplains in a manner that is authentic to their beliefs?

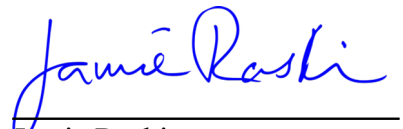
5. What guidance will the DOD provide to chaplains to ensure that chaplains do not proselytize to servicemembers?
6. Will a new guide replace the Army Spiritual Fitness Guide? If a new guide on spiritual or religious fitness will be produced, we request:
 - a. Criteria used to determine changes from the 2025 guide;
 - b. Any documents currently in formation; and
 - c. Information about who is being consulted.
7. Please share all evidence compiled by the Department used to determine there was undue “secular humanism” influence in the Army Spiritual Fitness Guide prior to these changes. How will the DoD ensure that any new materials promulgated to replace the Army Spiritual Fitness Guide do not promote any specific religion or religious belief, including theism?

We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your prompt response.

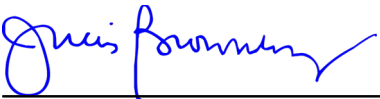
Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



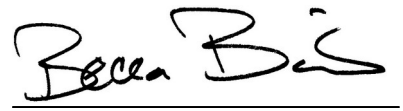
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Sarah McBride
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Becca Balint
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