

March 5, 2015

Honorable John McHugh
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We, the undersigned, are former officers who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States. We represent all the branches of the military and a range of religious denominations. We are writing to echo the concerns recently expressed to you by Members of Congress regarding discriminatory actions taken by the Army against Chaplain (Captain) Joseph "Joe" Lawhorn at Fort Benning. As former officers who have relied on the counsel of military chaplains, we understand the vital and constitutionally protected role they play in safeguarding troop morale, particularly during combat operations.

As you are aware, Chaplain Lawhorn's Brigade Commander, Colonel David G. Fivecoat reprimanded him for discussing his personal struggle with depression and referring to his Christian faith as a key resource in his struggle during a suicide prevention briefing. Colonel Fivecoat took this step contrary to the advice of his Battalion Commander and Equal Opportunity Advisor, who found no fault with Lawhorn's presentation. For simply mentioning both religious and secular resources at the briefing, Chaplain Lawhorn received a Letter of Concern from Colonel Fivecoat. This action contradicts Army Policy which calls for chaplains to be key members of a unit's Suicide Prevention Task Force and statutory protections for religious expression enacted in the FY 2013 and FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Acts. It is also contrary to the U.S. Army Suicide Prevention Resource Manual, which directs chaplains to incorporate spiritual fitness into suicide prevention training.

While Chaplain Lawhorn's recent change of duty assignments removes the Letter of Concern from his personnel file, the signal sent by Colonel Fivecoat's action has confused and jeopardized chaplain ministry across the Army. Current chaplains have contacted us expressing their own uncertainty about whether they too may now face reprimand for seeking to provide access to the very spiritual resources recognized by the Army itself as important in maintaining troop resiliency. Unfortunately, existing Army policy appears to be no longer a reliable guide for chaplains because it seems that commanders like Colonel Fivecoat can ignore policy for chaplains at will, and without consequence. How can chaplains function effectively and with confidence in such an unpredictable environment?

As former military officers concerned with the wellbeing of all service members, we urge you to affirm publically that chaplains and the spiritual resources they provide are vital in the Army's fight against suicide. Unless corrected publically by your office, Colonel Fivecoat's actions will continue to undermine trust in the chain of command, sow fear and uncertainty regarding

religious expression, and leave potentially vulnerable service members unaware of the spiritual resources available to them to combat depression and suicide.

Thank you for your prompt attention and reply. Please direct your response to General William Boykin c/o Family Research Council, 801 G St. NW, Washington, DC 20001.

Respectfully,



Larry W. Bailey, Captain, USN (Seal) Retired
Co-Founder
Special Operations Speaks



Lt. General (Ret.) William G. Boykin
Executive Vice President
Family Research Council



Richard F. Brauer, Jr., Col, USAF (Ret.)
Co-Founder
Special Operations Speaks



CH (COL) Ronald A Crews, USA Retired
Executive Director
Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty

Gary L. Harrell
MG, US Army (Ret.)



Gary Jones, BG Army (Ret.)
CEO
Myrmidon Consulting, LLC



Douglas E. Lee, CH (BG) US Army (Ret.)
President
Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty (CALL)



James A. Lyons, Jr., Admiral, USN Retired
President/CEO
LION Associates, LLC



Benjamin R. Mixon
LTG, US Army Retired



James F. Poe, CAPT, CHC, USN, Ret.
Chairman
ICECE



MG Paul E. Valley (US Army-Ret.)
Chairman and CEO
Stand Up America US



Jim Walker, BGen, USMC (Ret.)
Deputy Director International Projects
Samaritan's Purse



John B. Wells, Commander, USN, Ret.
Executive Director
Military-Veterans Advocacy, Inc.