



UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

OCT - 9 2013

PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

The Honorable J. Randy Forbes  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Forbes:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Secretary of Defense regarding reports that the Department of Defense (DoD) is processing applications for a humanist endorsing agent and a humanist chaplain. Oversight of this policy falls under my purview, and I have been asked to respond.

DoD places a high value on the rights of military personnel and their families to observe the tenets of their religions. We recognize that the free exercise of religion is an important element of the operational readiness and well-being of our force. Our chaplains are critically important to our ability to support the free exercise of religion by our military personnel and their families. Our long-standing policy accepts applications from all, but only recognizes religious organizations and clergy who can meet the religious requirements for military personnel and their families.

You are correct that a humanist organization has submitted prerequisite documents for recognition as an endorsing agent, and that an individual has applied for an Active Duty appointment as a chaplain based on the humanist organization's endorsement; both applications are pending. These applications will be reviewed using the same standards and processes we use to evaluate all chaplain accessions and religious organization requests for recognition.

DoD Instruction 1304.28, "Guidance for the Appointment of Chaplains for the Military Departments," is being revised to implement section 533 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013. We plan to issue this revised instruction by December of this year. This guidance will reflect processes which ensure only those organizations, and their endorsed clergy, demonstrating clear professional qualifications to provide for the free exercise of religion for military personnel and their families are given the privilege to serve in a Chaplain Corps.

Again, thank you for your continued interest in the free exercise of religion by our military personnel, and for your continued support of our military personnel and their families. A similar reply has been sent to the other Representatives who signed your letter.

Sincerely,

  
Jessica L. Wright  
Acting