

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 31, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin, III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

As you know the Center for Disease Control and Prevention announced some of the more restrictive COVID-19 guidelines are no longer necessary now that there is greater immunity in the general public due to natural immunity after recovery from COVID-19 infections and increasingly more effective pharmaceutical treatments for the disease. Their updated guidance released on August 11, 2022 reflects this new understanding by eliminating the differentiation of medical recommendations between unvaccinated and vaccinated people.

Furthermore, the CDC's new guidance states, "These circumstances now allow public health efforts to minimize the individual and societal health impacts of COVID-19 by focusing on sustainable measures to further reduce medically significant illness as well as to minimize strain on the health care system, while reducing barriers to social, educational, and economic activity..." Why not also reduce the strain on our already faltering military recruitment and retention efforts by taking new data into consideration, as the CDC has in their new guidance, and revise the Department of Defense's COVID-19 vaccine mandate? DoD's COVID-19 guidance is supposedly aligned with CDC guidelines for the general public and the current science, DoD should follow the CDC's lead and halt the discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated service members now that the science has shown there is no difference in the health recommendations between the two groups.

The Department of Defense is in the process of separating from active service hundreds of highly trained and specialized service members such as aviators and special operators that our nation has invested millions of dollars and years in training. Approximately 45,000 National Guardsmen are unable to participate in crucial training in support of their federal missions due to a vaccine mandate that does not slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. All of this is happening with the backdrop of a recruiting and retention crisis the military services have not seen in decades.

Lawful orders must be followed by our service members, but it is also the duty of the military officers and Department of Defense officials appointed over them to thoughtfully reconsider any standing order that has been rendered invalid as the facts on the ground change. The Department of Defense vaccine mandate is more detrimental than beneficial to the readiness of our armed forces and our nation's security, and we urge you to fully align the Department's COVID-19 policies with the Center of Disease Control and Prevention by rescinding the COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

1. In light of the new data and analysis from the CDC on the deleterious impact of COVID-19 mitigation has the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with individual service departments, identified military specialties or occupations that could be exempted from the Department of Defense-wide vaccine mandate?
2. Has the Department of Defense modeled the full impact of reduced retention and recruiting due to separating service members who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine on the Department's ability to execute its Global Force Management Allocation Plan?
3. The number of COVID-19 variants, the expectation that the virus will continue to mutate, CDC approval of multiple vaccine booster shots based on previous variants, and natural immunity make the definition of "fully vaccinated" an evolving and ambiguous definition. Will the Department of Defense consider these factors in future definitions and guidance for "fully vaccinated" requirements?
4. With the Center for Disease Control and Prevention is now easing COVID-19 restrictions in part due to immunity acquired by vaccination and natural immunity, is the Department of Defense considering recovery from a previous COVID-19 infection as a factor in the process of separating service members who refuse to take the COVID-19 vaccine?

We look forward to your prompt response. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Cordially,



Michael Waltz



Doug Lamborn



Robert J. Wittman



Pat Fallon



Jack Bergman



Elise Stefanik



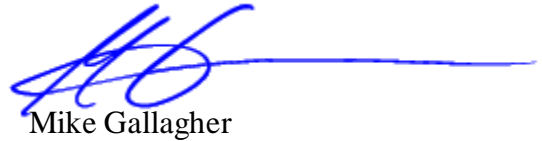
Jim Banks



Vicky Hartzler



Mike Johnson



Mike Gallagher



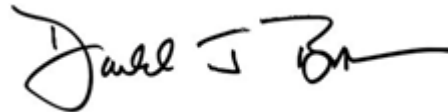
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