

MARK E. GREEN, M.D.

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Congress of the United States
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April 17, 2023

Lloyd James Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon,
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Secretary Austin,

I write to you with extreme concern over Walter Reed National Military Medical Center's recent cease and desist order to Holy Name College Friary, a Franciscan community which has provided pastoral care to Catholic service members and veterans for nearly twenty years. This order is a gross violation of the First Amendment and will have disasterous impacts on the spiritual health and readiness of our service members and veterans. As a veteran and Member of Congress charged with upholding our God-given and constitutional right to the free expression of religion, I am outraged at this disdain shown for people of faith.

The cease and desist order was placed upon Catholic Pastoral Care on the eve of Holy Week, one of the most important times in the church calendar. This complete disregard for our Catholic service members and veterans is as shocking as it is ignorant. As Archbishop Brologo of the Archdiocese for the Military Services has stated, Catholic priests are necessary for Catholic care at Walter Reed, which requires them to be present and active. Without the presence of Catholic priests, service members and veterans are being denied their constitutional right to practice their religion.

While no American ought to be denied their constitutional right to exercise religion, it is particularly egregious to deny that right to the very men and women that fight to keep our country free. A cease and desist order dismisses their sacrifice as being unworthy of the birthright of every human being.

Furthermore, allowing service members and veterans to practice their faith is critical for maintaining their spiritual health and readiness. As General Douglas MacArthur once said, "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." Having served in the Army in combat as a special operations physician, I have seen soldiers suffer the scars of war, both visible

and invisible. The invisible scars of war are taking their toll as the rates of military and veteran suicides continue to climb. These invisible scars afflict many regardless of faith or religious background, but one fact is undeniably clear: religious people appear to be at a lesser risk for suicide, and their religion is critical to their health and well-being.

Denying real Catholic care to service members and veterans at Walter Reed's is an unconstitutional and unconscionable act that will cause irreparable harm. I urge you to immediately reinstate services necessary to care for our Catholic service members and veterans, rather than attacking men and women of faith.

These brave men and women have dedicated their lives to ensuring that we can live safe and free. The least we can do is ensure the same for them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark E. Green, MD
Member of Congress

CC:

Captain Felix A. Bigby
Interim Director
Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

The Honorable Gilbert R. Cisneros Jr.
Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Dr. Lester Martinez-Lopez
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs

Lieutenant Colonel Dale Marlowe
Executive Director, Armed Forces Chaplain Board