

Army Recommends Chaplain be Charged with ‘Dereliction of Duty’ for Rescheduling Marriage Retreat

Decorated chaplain faces possibility of court martial and confinement in a military prison

FT. BRAGG, NC—First Liberty Institute today responded to new charges against its client, Chaplain Scott Squires, by an Army investigator—acting under the command of MG Kurt Sonntag—recommending that the chaplain be found guilty of “dereliction of duty” for taking three business days to reschedule a marriage retreat he was prohibited from facilitating.

Read the Army’s [report](#) and First Liberty’s [response](#).

“The United States Army, acting under the command of Major General Sonntag, is threatening to punish one of its chaplains because he followed the rules,” said Mike Berry, Deputy General Counsel and Director of Military Affairs to First Liberty. “The Army, or Congress, must hold Major General Sonntag accountable for allowing this aggressive anti-religious hostility against its military chaplains to occur under his command.”

The investigation follows a complaint that Chaplain Squires discriminated against a same-sex couple when he quickly rescheduled a marriage retreat his chaplain endorsing agency, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), prevents its chaplains from facilitating. Despite Department of Defense (DOD) regulations that require chaplains to adhere to their endorsers’ rules and religious tenets, the Army investigator recommended that Squires be found guilty of “dereliction of duty,” a court martial offense that could result in up to six months in military prison.

“I simply did what I’m required to do under Army regulations and my endorser’s rules,” said Chaplain Squires. “I am shocked that I would even be investigated, let alone threatened with punishment, for following the rules.”

Chaplain Squires, while complying with DOD and SBC rules and regulations, promptly rescheduled the marriage retreat with a new chaplain within three business days for the sole purpose of ensuring the same-sex couple could attend. They chose not to attend. The Army conducted an initial investigation in April of 2018. After First Liberty submitted a rebuttal identifying significant legal and factual errors, MG Sonntag directed the same investigator to continue investigating and to submit a new report.

“Major General Sonntag must immediately reject this investigation, if any chaplain under his command is to have the confidence that he or she will be protected when following military policy,” Berry says. “No chaplain should face the specter of a court martial and military prison for following the rules of their faith and the Army.”

About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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