

**Marine Corps Bans Inspirational Replica Dog Tags
After Complaint by Activist Group**

*Religious liberty law firm urges Marine Corps to allow replica dog tags,
other inspirational jewelry*

Washington, DC—First Liberty Institute today sent a letter to the United States Marine Corps Trademark Licensing Office urging it to allow Shields of Strength (“Shields”), a private, faith-based, business to continue producing military-themed items such as replica “dog tags” and jewelry. The USMC banned Shields from making replica dog tags with inspirational Bible verses after it received a complaint from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (“MRFF”).

You can read the letter [here](#).

“Events of the past several weeks make clear that our military personnel are constantly exposed to danger. And yet the MRFF seeks to deny them the freedom to wear Shields of Strength,” said Mike Berry, Chief of Staff for First Liberty Institute. “Denying our troops a source of inspiration, hope, and encouragement simply because it contains a religious message is an outrage. The Marine Corps should tell the MRFF to support our troops, not punish them.”

Because of the USMC’s decision, Shields of Strength had to decline a recent request for 2,000 replica dog tags made by a Marine Corps unit to be distributed upon request to individual Marines, many of whom could soon be deployed to the Middle East during rising tensions.

“It’s frustrating that those who are fighting for our freedom can’t have a Shield simply because the military is afraid of an outside activist group,” said Kenny Vaughan, owner of Shields of Strength. “I hope the Marine Corps reverses course and restores the ability of our brave military members to own a Shield of Strength.”

In its letter to the Marine Corps, First Liberty argues that, “Once the government has created a limited public forum via a trademark licensing regime, it cannot ‘discriminate against speech on the basis of its viewpoint.’ The Marine Corps is therefore prohibited from discriminating against [Shields] because of its inclusion of biblical references on its products, in its advertisements, or on its website.”

For over 20 years Kenny Vaughan and his wife Tammie have been making Shields of Strength replica dog tags with encouraging Bible verses or references on them for service members and first responders. Shields of Strength replica dog tags bear various military-themed emblems, logos, or insignia on one side and various faith-based messages such as Scripture verses or references on the other side. To date, the Vaughn’s have made over 4 million dog tags and given hundreds of thousands to the U.S. military and other ministries. During the Iraq War, they donated over 50,000 pieces a month and even fulfilled a single request for 30,000 pieces. Each branch of the military grants licenses to vendors to feature military trademarks on products.

Last year, MRFF sent a letter to the Army threatening “administrative and litigation complaints” to “compel compliance” unless the SoS stopped including religious references on its licensed products.

For more information go to FirstLiberty.org.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](http://FirstLiberty.org) 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.

To arrange an interview, contact Lacey McNiel at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.