



News Release
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Contact: Lacey McNeil, media@firstliberty.org
Direct: 972-941-4453

Breaking: Navy Reverses Plan to Cut Catholic Chaplains
First Liberty Institute Sent Letter Urging Defense Secretary to Defend Religious Liberty Rights of All Military Service Members

Washington, DC—Less than 24 hours after First Liberty Institute sent a [letter](#) to the Secretary of Defense urging him to act, the United States Navy reversed its decision that it would no longer provide Catholic priests to cover the shortage of Catholic military chaplains. First Liberty Institute’s letter to Secretary of Defense Mark Esper expressed concern over the decision and a series of other recent incidents in the U.S. military that have resulted in unlawful religious discrimination against service members.

“Our Commander in Chief, President Trump, continues to stand up for our men and women in uniform when they need him most. We commend the Navy’s quick course correction. If we are to remain the greatest military on the planet, we must ensure that our service members have access to the spiritual support they need,” said Mike Berry, First Liberty Institute General Counsel. “Religious freedom is crucial to maintaining a powerful, resilient military.”

According to the Department of Defense’s *Religious Identification and Practices Survey*, however, Catholics are the single largest religious demographic, comprising more than 1 in 5 service members. The courts have also concluded that the Department of Defense has a constitutional mandate to ensure that every service member has access to chaplains of their own denomination.

Earlier this year, First Liberty wrote a letter to Secretary Esper regarding the censorship of military chaplains by the U.S. Army in the midst of the COVID-19. In July, First Liberty again reached out to Secretary Esper on behalf of service members who were prohibited from attending in-person religious services off base by the U.S. Navy. The Navy quickly clarified that policy, allowing personnel to attend in-person services.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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