

7 December 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

The views expressed in this letter are mine and not the views of the Department of Defense, or the Michigan Army National Guard.

I am a Soldier in the Michigan Army National Guard who has a strong belief against taking the COVID-19 vaccine. Below is my story and how my refusal has affected my beliefs, my family and my life.

I have over twenty two years of active military experience and over 28 years of total service - both in the Marine Corps and the Army.. Throughout my military career I have deployed to Iraq & Kuwait, attended numerous military service schools, received multiple Army Commendation Medals and recently earned the title of distinguished honor graduate for my Senior Leadership Course (SLC).

Recently, the lack of information provided by leadership has been very disconcerting. I have been counseled as to my refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, however, there is no information being provided as to what will happen if I don't receive the vaccine, the timeline, repercussions, etc. All I have to go on is the media, which is extremely negative. Additionally, senior leadership has treated me as if I have a disease and am an irresponsible Soldier for not receiving the vaccine. I am a Soldier in the Army who has, until recently, followed all orders given to me. I lead by example, I am proud to wear the uniform, however, I feel that I should have an opinion on vaccines that are injected into my body. Especially a vaccine that is as controversial as this latest and very new vaccine. It has not undergone rigorous or lengthy testing, but instead has been hotly debated in politics and the media. Neither of which gives me any confidence in the validity of the vaccine.

Additionally, my wife, was diagnosed with breast cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic and because the vaccine can mimic breast cancer-like conditions (swollen lymph nodes and breast lumps), she was cautioned by the University of Michigan and warned that if she did get the vaccine and had additional symptoms similar to breast cancer that she would have to wait an additional 6 months prior to having any tests to determine the validity of cancer. In my opinion, six months is a significant amount of time to wait before conducting any cancer related tests. She has had numerous complications and infections and most recently did receive the vaccine because she was pressured by her employer. This is a serious violation of her HIPPA and medical rights.

I have serious concerns of government overreach as it relates to the COVID-19 vaccine - when will the mandates stop? How many additional booster vaccines will we need to have to stop the fear that the government and the media are encouraging? When is it enough? Ironically, every Soldier needs to participate in online HIPPA training annually - but our employers civilian and military are tracking our vaccination status - or lack thereof - and using it against us to terminate

our employment. This is unconstitutional and unacceptable. And, now after serving my country honorably for over 28 years, I'm being forced out of the military and being treated as a disgraced and dishonorable Soldier. I am a patriot and am strong in my beliefs.

Sincerely,
A Patriot Soldier

I would like to begin by stating that I have dutifully served this great State of Michigan and the people of the United States of America for close to twenty years. I have deployed for combat operations in Iraq, Natural disaster relief to other States of the Union, as well as support for many domestic operations here in Michigan. I consider my oath and service to this country a great honor and a privilege. During the course of my career, I have been taught to treat everyone's view on life with respect even if I don't agree with what they believe.

What I would like to convey in the following personal testimony is that I would like to be treated with the same respect loyalty and integrity by my State leadership as I have dutifully practiced towards them over the course of my many years of service. However, for reason I do not understand the leadership of the State of Michigan has taken a toxic turn. There are established policies in place for Soldiers to follow as to get exemptions and or accommodations for many varied situations. In my case, I have sought a religious exemption based on my faith practice to the Covid vaccination mandate. I cannot overstate the level of my disappointment over the continued harassment, threats of adverse action, and gross manipulation of the established processes as to force me to act against my conscious. All that I ask us for fair treatment and due process as the process plays itself out.

With that in mind, I would like to personally thank Sen. Barrett and Rep. Alexander for their quick response and to the Appropriations Subcommittee for their willingness to review this matter.

To begin, the Michigan National Guard distributed a policy after Department of Defense published a policy regarding the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. The policy had an informational process and a flow chart to follow as to filing documents, how to route the documents, as well as how to conduct appeals based on religious exemption and/or a medical exemption.

Based on this guidance, on October 04, 2021, I received my first formal counseling about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. The deadline for service members to submit a request for the exemption or receive the vaccine was October 15, 2021. The policy stated all exemption packets

would be processed and no actions would be taken against Soldiers until the packets are formally reviewed and adjudicated. This was to include a subsequent appeal process if so requested by the affected Soldier[s]. If at the end of the appeals process it was determined that a given religious accommodation was to be denied, a Soldier would have a final opportunity to receive the vaccine without any adverse action. In my case, if I still declined at that point it was outlined that I would face some type of administrative action. It was implied by my Unit Leadership that I would be separated from service for bad conduct or dishonorable service, a status that equates me to that of a criminal with subsequent impact on my civil rights and access to military benefits.

After the deadline in early October as noted above, a subsequent Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) was published that changed the processes as to both the routing chain and procedures process along with an additional requirement being added for a Soldiers immunization record to be included. During the entirety of this process my unit leadership has been coercive and made threats towards me and other Soldiers in my unit undergoing the same legal process.

These threats include statements such as the following, **“you are going to be removed from service”**, **“it would be better for you to resign so you do not face punitive action”**, **“they [the MIARNG Leadership] are not going to approve any exemptions”**, **“you will not be allowed to retire with benefits [implying a dishonorable discharge]”**, **“you will face charges with possible punishments”** [implying I was disobeying a direct order, failed to fulfill contract obligations, and/or was willfully endangering other soldiers], **“the Army does not care about the process”**. These are but a few of the many threats that took place during direct conversations either in person or over the phone. Again, all the Soldiers in my unit who are undergoing the process of requesting a religious exemption have experienced variations of this same treatment and threats of adverse actions.

On November 17, 2021 I was asked to go to the First Sergeant’s office. During our conversation he stated that I was instructed to report to the headquarters building at 0800 Monday November 22, 2021 and to take the vaccine with or without my consent. If I failed to comply, I would be given until December 15, 2021 to be fully vaccinated. If I am not fully vaccinated on December 16, 2021, I was to be placed in an involuntarily leave status pending the determination of my

religious exemption packet, something that with appeals could take months. It was articulated to me that once all my accumulated personal leave has been exhausted, I would be removed from my Active Duty status and placed back into an M-Day National Guard unit until June 2, 2021. On June 2, 2021 I would then be discharged and separated from the Army National Guard. Based on the previous threats made against me and confirmed by other members in my unit, I assumed it would be some type of punitive discharge status.

To this I stated to my unit First Sargent that I have a religious accommodation pending and it has not been processed yet. The First Sargent stated that it didn't matter and Michigan National Guard leadership did not view it as an adverse action to remove me from active status because I am not being separated from service. I would argue that losing my livelihood and ability to provide for my family is an adverse reaction. Because my First Sargent does not have this power or authority nor is it typical that a Senior NCO would make these kind of threats and in this manner I then asked him "who is this coming from". His response was that the Michigan Army National Guard Chief of Staff's Office sent out an email to unit leadership with these instructions and outlined what actions would follow to any Soldiers that refused to get the Covid vaccination despite any personal request for exemptions still being processed.

I subsequently asked my chain of command for clarification regarding instruction from the Chain-of-Command and if we needed to report to Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ) if we had a pending exemption. My Commander stated he would reach out to JFHQ for further guidance. I value the Chain-of-Command and I have always believed that any issues need to be worked out at the lowest level, but at this point I felt like my Chain-of-Command had completely broken down.

It was at this point that I reached out to Representative Julie Alexander to ask for help. Representative Alexander reached out to Senator Tom Barrett. I explained the situation and he reached out to the TAG's liaison for answers to many of the above questions that would naturally be raised. Senator Barrett and Representative Alexander received the answer relayed the response to me before my chain of command did.

My unit leadership has been less than supportive throughout this entire process and it is apparent that they do not have a clear picture on the administrative requirements. They have consistently ascribed blame upon Joint Force Headquarters, the Michigan Adjutant General, the Michigan Chief of Staff and other senior leaders for the hard line response against Soldiers despite published policy on how to request an exemption. To be fair, because of the many changes to the timelines and procedures it has been difficult for my unit leadership to stay abreast of numerous changes and retractions.

As for myself and Soldiers in my situation, it is very hard to complete the process if the requirements and guidelines keep changing. I understand I joined the military and its associated need for good order and discipline. Over the course of my career I have received countless vaccinations. Until recently I have never questioned receiving an immunization. However, based on the research, my personal religious beliefs and convictions I have a conscientious objection to this vaccine.

As I stated at the beginning of my testimony, I have rendered many years of honorable service to my State and to this great Nation with duty that took me to many of the worst situations or locations imaginable. I grew up in the Michigan Guard and continue to faithfully serve the Michigan Guard. Never have I seen a situation in which the leadership, from the top down has created a toxic command climate that affects hundreds of Michigan Guard Soldiers in a negative manner. The chain-of-command, from my immediate commander to the Adjutant General of the Michigan National Guard as identified by my Unit leadership has willfully disregarded National Guard Bureau policy procedure and process for what are legal courses of action. Meanwhile the command has continuously threatened punitive action & attempted coercion as to force Soldiers against their will and against policy to take this vaccination. I and the Soldiers in position have served Faithfully & with Honor, all we ask is to be treated with decency & Honor until this administrative process plays itself out. As a NCO, I humbly request that the Chain-of-Command live by The Army Values. I am the same person as I was yesterday, as I was last week, last year, as I was in Iraq. Give me the dignity I deserve and show me the Honor that I have always shown you.