



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

David Silverman
President

June 9, 2014

General Mark Welsh:

As President of American Atheists, I write to express my outrage at the Air Force's proposal to weaken regulations in Paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12 of Air Force Instruction 1-1, prohibiting airmen from abusing their positions of authority for the purpose of religious proselytization. I share the grave objections of Mikey Weinstein of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation to this proposal and will fight any attempt by religious extremists to abuse their positions as leaders in the military by forcing religion into a place where it does not belong.

It is the duty of every airman to defend the Constitution of the United States, including the First Amendment's protection of religious belief or nonbelief. The proposed changes to AFI 1-1 would undermine the freedom of religion for minority believers and non-believers, a foundation of the promise of our nation. The task of protecting our nation is already a difficult one; creating an environment in which religious participation is implicitly or explicitly demanded and expected makes it an even harder one for atheists and members of religious minority groups.

It could not be more simple: The Air Force does not need a regulation protecting the free expression of religion because

1. The First Amendment already guarantees airmen that right, and
2. The proposed regulations override current regulation protecting the rights of subordinate airmen from proselytization from their superiors.

Air Force Instruction 1-1 protects the rights of all airmen, not just religious minorities and atheists, to do their jobs without being pressured into kowtowing to a god they lack belief in, lest they face unfair or unequal treatment during the course of their work.

Whether a superior airman's religious belief is "sincerely held" or not is completely irrelevant to their duty to uphold the Constitution. This language is a smoke screen designed to excuse impermissible behavior which would "degrade morale, good order, and discipline in the Air Force" and "degrade the trust and confidence that the public" and other airmen have in the United States Air Force. Accordingly, it has no place in Air Force regulations.

On behalf of our members and all those who respect, understand, and value a secular government and a military free from abuses of authority in the name of religion, I urge you to reject the proposed changes to AFI 1-1.

Sincerely,

David P. Silverman
President