

## Page 163-164 of Report Language in 2016 NDAA

### Religious freedom and role of military chaplains

The committee continues to encourage the Department of Defense and Armed Forces to support servicemembers' right to express their sincerely held religious and moral beliefs. Individual expressions of religious and moral beliefs in the military will be accommodated unless it is determined that such individual actions could have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, and good order and discipline. The committee recognizes the vital role of religious beliefs and the expression of faith for many servicemembers and their families. Preserving a military culture that protects the freedom of expression, including the freedom not to believe, is important to the morale and to recruiting and retention in the Armed Forces.

The committee further recognizes that a military chaplain is a certified religious military professional of a qualified religious organization who has satisfied the professional religious education and ecclesiastical qualifications of his or her endorsing agency and is appointed a commissioned officer in an Armed Service's chaplain corps. The chaplain remains a representative of and accountable to the endorsing faith group for the religious ministry he or she provides to members of the Armed Services and to their families. The committee expects that commanders will ensure a chaplain's right to religious expression and to provide religious exercise and guidance that accurately represent the chaplain's faith are protected, respected, and unencumbered by any means contrary to section 533 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (Public Law 112-239) as amended by section 532 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (Public Law 113-66).

The committee recognizes the role of the military chaplain in the Armed Forces to care for the spiritual well-being of servicemembers and their families. As part of their service, many chaplains play a critical function in providing for the mental health and emotional needs of servicemembers and their families by helping them to deal with the unique pressures and stresses associated with military service. This includes, but is not limited to, suicide prevention, coping with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, sexual assault, providing marriage and family counseling, and providing religious and moral guidance. The committee encourages the Department of Defense to continue efforts to integrate military chaplains into the programming for mental health and well-being and to provide clear guidance for addressing formations and groups where attendance by service members is required.

The committee also notes the results of a RAND Corporation survey of Army chaplains published on April 7, 2015 which concluded that 44 percent of chaplains and 57 percent of chaplain assistants believe they need more training in suicide prevention treatment. No later than 180 days after the enactment of this Act, the Department of Defense shall provide to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and the House of Representatives a report on shortfalls in suicide prevention training for the chaplain corps in each service branch and a strategy to address these shortfalls.