

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 4, 2025

SENT VIA EMAIL & FAX: 703-697-8036

The Honorable Daniel Driscoll
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310

Re: Unconstitutional promotion of religion at West Point military academy

Dear Secretary Driscoll:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding your recent decision to put West Point's official crest on bibles in the West Point Cadet Chapel. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 42,000 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that you recently ordered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to put the school's crest on the bibles in its chapel.¹ We understand that in 2024, the bibles in the chapel were redesigned to remove the crest, presumably to remove the appearance that the Academy was in any way promoting or affiliating itself with one particular religious belief.

In announcing the reversal, you issued a statement to Fox News that made clear the religious rationale behind your directive:²

Since the founding of West Point and before, generations of cadets, officers, and Soldiers have drawn strength and inspiration from God's word...The decision to remove the Academy's historic crest from the Bibles in the Cadet Chapel is yet another example of the previous administration pushing far-left politics into our military institutions. I am directing West Point to reverse this decision immediately and restore this important symbol of Duty, Honor, Country.

We urge you to reconsider this ill-advised directive and return to a policy that respects the religious liberty rights of all cadets and service members. West Point's motto is "Duty, Honor, Country." None of those values are served by religious favoritism.

Cadets and service members at U.S. military academies have a constitutional right to be free from religious pressure or indoctrination. It is well settled that government actors—including the U.S. Army—may not show favoritism toward or coerce belief or participation in religion. *See generally Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000); *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); *McCullum v. Bd. of Ed.*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Including the official academy crest on Christian bibles transforms these sectarian texts into government-sanctioned religious items, conveying an unmistakable message that West Point and the U.S.

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/decision-remove-west-point-crest-from-chapel-bibles-reversed-secretary-army>.

² *Id.*

Army favor Christianity over other religions and nonreligion. That message is divisive, exclusionary, and undermines military cohesion.

The military is strongest when it reflects and respects the diversity of the service members who comprise it. Cadets come from all walks of life. Many are Christian, yes, but many others are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, humanist, or otherwise unaffiliated. Your recent public statement not only fails to acknowledge this pluralism, it actively promotes a Christian nationalist vision of the military that is antithetical to American constitutional values. Your claim that removing the crest from bibles was an example of “far-left politics” is especially troubling. Efforts to maintain government neutrality on religion are not political. They are a legal and ethical imperative under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Publicly funded institutions like West Point may accommodate private religious exercise, but they must never give the impression of favoring a particular faith. That is why the prior decision to remove the crest from the chapel bibles was a sensible and constitutionally sound one. Reversing that decision not only undermines religious neutrality, it emboldens those who seek to transform our military into a tool of Christian proselytizing. It also marginalizes past, current, and future Army members who are among the nearly thirty percent of adult Americans who are religiously unaffiliated, as well as the additional six percent of Americans adhering to non-Christian faiths.³ Nearly thirty percent of today’s military members do not have a religious preference.⁴ As more members of Gen Z join the military, it becomes all the more important to respect their non-belief. At least a third of Generation Z (those born after 1996) have no religion,⁵ with a recent survey revealing almost half of Gen Z qualify as “nones” (religiously unaffiliated).⁶

To avoid further Establishment Clause concerns and out of respect for the country’s religious diversity, please uphold your constitutional duty to ensure that the United States Army remains a secular, inclusive institution that represents all Americans. Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to address this matter. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Legal Counsel
Freedom From Religion Foundation

³ Gregory A. Smith, *Religious ‘Nones’ in America: Who They Are and What They Believe*, Pew Research Center, Jan. 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

⁴ See MAAF Department of Defense Religious Preference and Chaplain Support Study, Nov. 2019, <https://militaryatheists.org/news/wp-content/uploads/MAAF-Demographics-20191114.pdf>.

⁵ Samuel J. Abrams, *Perspective: Why even secular people should worry about Gen Z’s lack of faith*, Deseret News, Mar. 4, 2023, <https://www.deseret.com/2023/3/4/23617175/gen-z-faith-religious-nones-civic-life-volunteers-charity/>.

⁶ Ryan P. Burge, *2022 Cooperative Election Study of 60,000 respondents*, Apr. 3, 2023, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/>.