



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
3000 MARINE CORPS PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON DC 20350-3000

OLA  
21 Jan 22

The Honorable Darrell Issa  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510-0550

Dear Representative Issa:

Thank you for your letter of January 17, 2022, addressed to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, concerning religious accommodation requests for exemptions to the COVID-19 vaccination requirement. I appreciate your advocacy on behalf of our Marines and Sailors and share your commitment to religious liberty in the military services.

Consistent with the Constitution and Federal law, Marine Corps policy is to accommodate individual expressions of sincerely held conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs which do not have an adverse impact on a compelling government interest. The Marine Corps has a compelling interest in mission accomplishment at the individual, unit, and organizational levels, including such necessary elements of mission accomplishment as readiness, unit cohesion, good order and discipline, and health and safety.

Service members who request a religious accommodation exempting them from the COVID-19 vaccine mandate forward their requests through their chain of command to the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for adjudication. All accommodation requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and each request is given full consideration with respect to the facts and circumstances submitted in the request. Factors considered by the adjudication authority include, but are not limited to, whether or not receiving the COVID-19 vaccine substantially burdens the requestor's sincerely held religious beliefs and whether or not receiving the vaccine is the least restrictive means of achieving the Marine Corps' compelling interest in readiness and health and safety.

Chaplains play a critical role throughout the process by counseling every Marine who submits a religious accommodation request and providing advice to the adjudication authority for each request. However, Department of Defense and Marine Corps regulations assign adjudication authority to the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, as the Commandant's designee, because the ultimate question is whether or not approving the request will have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, good order and discipline, or health and safety. This is a decision that requires consideration of factors that fall outside the expertise of a trained chaplain.

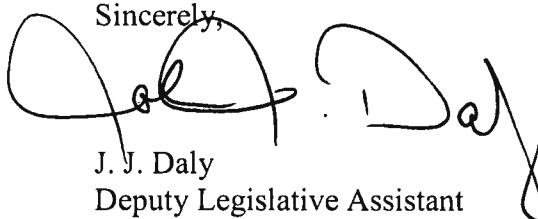
At the time of this writing, three Marines have been granted religious accommodations for exemptions from the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. In two cases, the Marines are on terminal leave and in the other the Marine has transitioned into the Department of Defense Skill Bridge Program, a 180-day training program in private industry. When acting on these three religious accommodation requests, the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps determined that, when weighing the compelling governmental interest, the likelihood of their vaccination status impacting military readiness and health and safety was remote because the requestors are no longer serving with Marine Corps commands.

I am aware that some Marines have voiced dissatisfaction that the decision letter they received from the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs was not individually tailored to their request. However, each request is carefully considered on an individual basis by the adjudication authority who is aided by the Religious Accommodation Review Board, the Director of Health Services, a legal advisor, and a chaplain. I am not aware of any case in which the adjudication authority has questioned the sincerity of a service member's belief. Rather, the crux of the decision in the many denials and the few approvals has been the Marine Corps' compelling interest in readiness, and the health and safety of the total force.

While masking, social distancing, hygiene, teleworking, and other similar measures, individually or in combination, have been shown to help slow the spread of the virus, they are simply not as effective as vaccination. Moreover, these measures are often incompatible with the demands of military life, where Marines and Sailors must live, work, realistically train, and, if necessary, fight in close quarters. The demands of military life render these less restrictive means of furthering the government's compelling interests in military readiness, and the health and safety of the force even less effective than such measures among the civilian community.

Thank you for your continued support of our Marines and Sailors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. J. Daly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping tail.

J. J. Daly  
Deputy Legislative Assistant  
Office of Legislative Affairs