

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20050

Dear President Biden:

We write to respectfully request you issue a waiver of informed consent to ensure members of the armed forces receive a COVID-19 vaccine at the earliest opportunity. Vaccinating every eligible servicemember will improve readiness and have an immediate and positive impact on the communities in which they serve.

Department of Defense (DOD) officials have testified to Congress that approximately one-third of servicemembers offered a COVID-19 vaccine have declined.¹ Recent media reports have shown overwhelming evidence that disinformation and vaccine skepticism are rampant within our formations.²

This is a critical threat to our national security and public health.

We witnessed the devastating effects of this virus on an unvaccinated force during the breakouts aboard the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* and more recently aboard ships deployed in the Middle East. Moreover, our military readiness continues to be negatively impacted by scaled down or cancelled joint exercises, and families bear the burden of extended deployments and quarantines.

DOD has made admirable efforts to educate servicemembers on the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. Yet, these measures have been outpaced by disinformation dominating social media. The most effective tool the Department may utilize to ensure widespread vaccination is a mandate. DOD's mandatory vaccination system has been used safely and effectively for nearly all mission-essential Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved drugs, including vaccinations against smallpox and anthrax.

FDA is confident that the three vaccines currently approved under Emergency Use Authorizations are safe and effective.³ The bureaucratic process of final approval of these vaccines through Biologics License Applications will waste precious time in the Department's fight against this virus. The end-result of mandatory vaccinations for members of the armed forces will almost certainly be the same. However, immediate action through a waiver of informed consent will undoubtedly save lives.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2021/02/17/vaccine-service-members-refusal/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/27/us/politics/coronavirus-vaccine-refusal-military.html>

³ <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines>

Requiring DOD to obtain informed consent prior to vaccination is not only harmful to our national security, but contrary to the best interests of servicemembers, their families, communities, and colleagues.

We request you rapidly issue this waiver to give DOD the authority it requires to ensure readiness in the face of current and future threats. Thank you for your consideration of this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JP', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JIMMY PANETTA
Member of Congress

cc:
The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
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Washington D.C. 20301-1000

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

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