

DOUG LAMBORN  
5TH DISTRICT, COLORADO

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
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**Congress of the United States**  
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May 17, 2022

Lieutenant General Richard M. Clark  
Superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy  
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 3100  
USAF Academy, CO 80840-5002

Dear Lieutenant General Clark,

I write today to express my deep concern regarding your handling of COVID-19 vaccine exemption requests submitted by U.S. Air Force Academy cadets. During next week's graduation ceremony, four cadets will unceremoniously end their service before it has begun because of your refusal to grant them religious exemptions to the Department of Defense's COVID-19 vaccination requirement. Not only does your decision penalize their religious beliefs and violate their First Amendment rights, but it also upholds a requirement that is currently subject to numerous unresolved lawsuits.

These brave cadets who have been placed in your charge are being presented with an impossible choice: get vaccinated in violation of their religious beliefs, elect to voluntarily resign even though they aspire to service, or face legal action for disobeying a lawful order from a military that does not value their commitment. Not only will they not commission into the United States military, but they will not graduate despite meeting all requirements they agreed to when they entered the U.S. Air Force Academy four years ago. Furthermore, they may even be forced to pay back the value of an education for which they will not even receive a degree, placing an unexpected financial burden as much as \$200,000 or more on each cadet.

Your decision deprives these cadets of the place they have earned in the Long Blue Line. It also threatens the future of nine others currently enrolled at the U.S. Air Force Academy who are also seeking exemptions to the vaccine mandate on religious grounds. Furthermore, you stand alone in your decision as neither West Point nor the U.S. Naval Academy are penalizing cadets or midshipmen for not getting vaccinated, and their seniors are allowed to graduate regardless of their vaccination status.

I anticipate this to be the beginning of an extended conversation that you will have with myself, other members of Congress, and a large contingent of military and veterans advocates in my district. Please provide the following information:

1. Please provide a copy of all written materials, policies, guidelines, directives, notices, and any other materials that explains the academy's current COVID-19 vaccine policy and the manner in which an individual is able to seek an exemption from the mandate.

2. Please provide a copy of all written materials, guidelines, directives, notices, and communications related to COVID-19 vaccinations received by the academy from the White House or the Department of Defense.
3. Please provide the total number of cadets that have requested COVID-19 vaccine exemptions to date and a breakdown of how many of those requests have been for medical reasons and how many have been for sincerely held religious beliefs.
4. Please provide the number of COVID-19 vaccine exemptions have you granted to cadets.
5. Please provide the total number of unvaccinated cadets that are currently enrolled in the academy (and any other program or institution under your supervision).
6. What is your rationale for applying such strict penalties on cadets, while your counterparts at West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy have elected to allow their seniors to graduate while their exemption cases are pending?
7. Will the four cadets in question receive degrees for the coursework they have completed at the U.S. Air Force Academy?
8. Are the cadets able to appeal your decision, or do they need to resort to legal recourse in order to have their degrees and military status reinstated?

Please provide a response no later than May 30, 2022. Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Lamborn". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Doug Lamborn  
Member of Congress

cc: General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., Chief of Staff of the Air Force  
General John Raymond, Chief of Space Operations