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Pentagon, military personnel disconnected on religious liberty

In testimony before Congress, Chaplain Alliance calls for education on religious freedom

WASHINGTON — A disconnect between the Pentagon and military personnel in the field has resulted in confusion as to how religious liberty protections should be implemented. That was the observation of Chaplain (COL) Ron Crews, USA Retired, executive director of Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, as he [testified](#) before the House Armed Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Military Personnel Wednesday.

Crews cited examples of misunderstandings that have led to reprimands for chaplains and service members praying in Jesus’ name or quoting Bible verses.

“This double-standard must stop...,” Crews said. “There is a disconnect between the Pentagon and the field on how religious liberty should be implemented.”

Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) and ranking member Susan Davis (D-Calif.) chair the committee, which held the hearing at which Crews testified. Crews spoke of the need for education within the military on how to apply existing freedom of conscience protections in section 533 of the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act – a section intended to allow chaplains to practice their faith.

“While there is no question chaplains will continue to serve all service members with respect and care, there is increasing reason to fear that the government will not allow them their constitutional freedom to do that job as their faith requires and their own conscience demands,” Crews said in additional [written remarks](#) to the subcommittee. “And that diminution in liberty will in turn harm the rights of those such chaplains exist to serve: the men and women of our military.”

“We want to make sure chaplains understand that they can be representatives of their faith groups – and are encouraged to do so – even in this politicized environment,” Crews commented after the hearing. “Greater education for military officials on the existing religious liberty protections that chaplains and other service members have would be a significantly helpful step in the right direction.”

- [Crews’ opening statement to the committee](#) (video, 3:05)
- [Crews’ full written remarks to the committee](#)

The Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty is an organization of chaplain endorsers, the faith groups that provide chaplains for the U.S. military and other agencies needing chaplains. The endorsers in the Chaplain Alliance speak for more than 2,600 chaplains serving the armed forces.

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