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Chaplain Alliance to Army: Chaplain shouldn't be threatened for doing his job

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Army has issued a [letter of concern](#) to one of its chaplains for “using Christian scriptures and solutions” during a suicide prevention training session with the 5th Ranger Training Battalion held on Nov. 20 at the University of North Georgia.

COL David Fivecoat, commander of the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade at Fort Benning, Ga., ordered Chaplain (CPT) Joe Lawhorn, USA, into his office on Thanksgiving Day to hand him a letter the commander had written. The letter warned Lawhorn to be “careful to avoid any perception you are advocating one system of beliefs over another.”

“No chaplain should be threatened for doing exactly what a chaplain is supposed to do,” said Chaplain (COL) Ron Crews, USA Retired, executive director of Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty. “Chaplain Lawhorn’s presentation was perfectly legal and protected by the Right of Conscience Clause passed by Congress in the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act.”

Lawhorn is one of the few Army Ranger-qualified chaplains currently serving in the Army. During the session, he shared his personal struggles with depression while he was a Ranger and how he learned to conquer by following the example of the Israel’s warrior king, David. At no time did he say his was the only way or even the preferred way of dealing with depression, and at no time did he deny the validity of any other method. In fact, Lawhorn made that clear during the session and provided the attendees with a list of other resources.

“Chaplains bare their souls for their soldiers to help them with crises they may be going through. That’s what chaplains do,” Crews said. “Chaplain Lawhorn should be commended not condemned.”

“I urge you to reconsider your actions and remove this Letter of Concern from his file,” wrote Crews to in a Dec. 2 [letter](#) to Fivecoat. “Chaplain Lawhorn should not be punished for simply being an excellent chaplain.”

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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