



MILITARY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
f o u n d a t i o n

CHAPLAIN ALLIANCE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY / MILITARY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOUNDATION

May 1, 2015 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact CHAPLAIN ALLIANCE at info@chaplainalliance.org, or call 571-293-2427

Contact MRFF at bekki.miller@militaryreligiousfreedom.org or call 337-356-8696

Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, Military Religious Freedom Foundation agree: Navy went too far

Violated religious liberty of sailor recruits

WASHINGTON – Dr. Ron Crews, USA (Ret.), executive director of Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, and Michael L. “Mikey” Weinstein, president and founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, released a [joint statement](#) Friday, which reads in part as follows:

“We have testified before the same Congressional panels. We have spoken out on the same incidents in the services. And, we are always on opposing sides, but in this instance it is easy for us both to say that the Navy went too far and is clearly in violation of the Constitutional religious liberty rights of American sailors at the Recruit Training Command.”

On April 3, the senior leadership at the Recruit Training Command informed John Chantry, a civilian and practicing Druid who had been conducting Earth-based religious services at the RTC for three years, that he would no longer be permitted to perform any religious ceremonies on base.

The e-mail was reportedly in response to a mistaken interpretation of Navy regulations which first – but not exclusively – require religious services to be performed by a uniformed chaplain. Even in the wake of the public uproar over these actions, the RTC has yet to reinstate Chantry’s services, in which 75 to 200 sailors partake, according to news reports. Further, the *Navy Times* reported on April 22 that the decision by the commanding officer would curtail access to religious services for Unitarian-Universalists, Church of Christ, and other non-liturgical Protestant faith groups.

“Religious liberty is guaranteed to all, whether you are Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Druid, or any other small group faith,” said Crews. “If the freedom to worship and live your faith is not available to one service member, it’s not available to any. We sincerely hope that the command will reread the Navy regulation and reverse course on this dangerous and unconstitutional decision.”

“This isn’t about civil privileges,” said Weinstein. “It’s about civil rights. The Navy is not allowed to choose winners and losers when it comes to these constitutional rights. What’s more, access to religious services has been proven to bolster resilience and prevent suicide. So, this is not only about the spiritual well-being of American sailors; this is a matter of life or death. We will not rest until the Navy reinstates religious services for the approximately 250 Earth-based worshippers impacted by this misguided decision.”

On April 30, Capt. Pfeifle, commanding officer at the RTC, responded to a written complaint that MRFF filed. Both Chaplain Alliance and MRFF agree in their [joint letter](#) to Pfeifle that the Navy continues to misread its regulations and to violate the constitutionally protected religious liberty of sailors under its command.

[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. [The Military Religious Freedom Foundation](#) is the only civil rights organization devoted to protecting the constitutionally-mandated separation of church and state within the U.S. Military. MRFF is now representing well over 41,000 active duty armed servicemembers, veterans, and civilian personnel.

###