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Chaplain Alliance sends letter to West Point affirming public prayer

WASHINGTON — The Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, an organization of chaplain endorsers, working with Alliance Defending Freedom, sent a letter to United States Military Academy at West Point after a secularist group protested invocations at various West Point events.

“We are grateful for the services of Alliance Defending Freedom in providing a legal analysis that supports the religious liberty of all cadets at West Point,” said Chaplain (COL) Ron Crews, USAR retired, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty. “Chaplains, cadets and staff have been praying at West Point events since its founding in 1802. These prayers have legal right to continue.”

Last month, Americans United for Separation of Church and State wrote to the military academy and claimed that invocations at West Point events, including Plebe Parent Weekend, Ring Weekend, Thanksgiving Dinner, the Martin Luther King Award Dinner, and graduation, were unconstitutional and coerce cadets to participate in and endorse religion.

As the Alliance Defending Freedom letter explains, however, “The historical practice of offering prayer, especially at military and university functions at West Point, does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.” Rather, as the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit has stated, the invocations, offered by West Point chaplains and cadets, “solemnize public occasions, express confidence in the future, and encourage the recognition of what is worthy of appreciation in society.”

The letter also explains that, contrary to AUSCS’s accusations, “West Point does not require cadets to participate in the invocations or even listen to them” and “two federal courts of appeals rejected the notion that prayers at significant public university events coerce attendees to participate in religion.”

“Chaplains and military personnel have been praying since General George Washington established the Chaplain Corps in July 1775,” added Crews. “We encourage the leadership at West Point to continue offering public prayers.”

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 2,000 chaplains serving the armed forces.

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