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**NEW DOD POLICY ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS MORE THAN
BEARDS AND TURBANS**

The new (DOD) directive ordering accommodation of religious apparel and beards is an important development in protecting religious liberty. The directive incorporates provisions of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which currently applies to most federal laws and policies. Extending these protections will rightly benefit all faiths, including traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs.

Military-Veterans Advocacy Executive Director, retired Navy Commander John B. Wells praised the policy portion of the regulation. This directive articulates DOD policy as placing “a high value on the rights of members of the Military Services to observe the tenets of their respective religions.” Wells said. He noted that other provisions of the regulation requires Military Departments to accommodate individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs such as conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs. The new rule also specifically prohibits retaliation against the expression of sincerely held beliefs (conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs). It goes on to prohibit using these beliefs as the basis of any adverse personnel action, discrimination, or denial of promotion, schooling, training, or assignment.

“The choice of this directive as an avenue for implementing the 2013 NDAA is curious,” notes Wells, “and may be an attempt by the Administration to minimize its effect. It does bar discrimination based on religious beliefs and expression, except where it affects good order and discipline or unit cohesion.” Wells continued. “It further requires the military to show a compelling government interest to justify any interference with these beliefs. Even then any restriction must be narrowly tailored to attain that interest. Wide sweeping over-broad actions against those who express their faith are prohibited.

Military-Veterans Advocacy is a non-profit group based in Slidell, Louisiana dedicated to protect the rights of current and former members of the armed forces through litigation and advocacy. Point of contact is John B. Wells 985 641 1855/985-290-6940

The new Department of Defense policy entitled DOD Instruction 1300.17 can be reviewed at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/130017p.pdf>

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