

Position: The Reserve Organization of America (ROA) urges Congress to provide **100 percent back-pay** to certain reinstated service members.

Background: Mass inoculation campaigns for safety and readiness have been conducted by the U.S. military since the Revolutionary War. While ROA **does not** challenge the military's authority to conduct these campaigns, ROA simultaneously believes the uniformed services **cannot** afford the bureaucratic expense and personnel losses involved in the COVID-19 related discharges.

To date, more than 8,400 service members have been forced out of the military for failing to comply with the COVID vaccine requirement(s). As of Oct. 2, 2023, only 43 have rejoined.

More than 95 percent of the total force is currently vaccinated. The threat COVID-19 poses to readiness is simply less than the threat posed by an ever-shrinking warfighting force, coupled with the greatest recruiting challenge in history.

The greatest recruiting challenge in All-Volunteer Force history: *fast facts*

- 77 percent of young people (aged 16 to 24) are not eligible for military service without waivers, with 44 percent being ineligible for multiple reasons.
- 52 percent of Generation Z has never considered military service, with only 9 percent of young people saying they would consider.
- During the last fiscal year, the Army missed its recruiting goal by 25 percent.
- School closures and remote instruction have caused a nine percent aggregate decrease in scores on the military's standardized test and imposed barriers to access for recruiters.
- Youth obesity rates (a main reason for ineligibility) increased to 22 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The percentage of Americans expressing confidence in the military decreased to 64 percent (down from 72 percent in 2020).
- The percentage of military families who would recommend military service to someone they care about has decreased by 12 from 75 percent in 2019 to 63 percent in 2021.

With the Pentagon's Aug. 21, 2021, and Nov. 30, 2021, COVID-19 vaccine requirements now rescinded, it is time to support reinstating service members discharged on the sole basis for not receiving the vaccine with full back pay.

The Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act contains several remedies for those service members separated for vaccine refusal. However, **100 percent back pay** was not included.

ROA urges Congress to compel the Secretary of Defense to provide reinstated active and reserve component service members discharged solely for non-compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination orders with full compensation for any pay and benefits lost.

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