



The United States Department of Justice Religious Liberty Commission
Minutes of the December 10, 2025 Hearing
Religious Liberty in the Military and State and Local Religious Liberty Issues

The fourth hearing explored religious liberty foundations, threats, and opportunities in the military, as well as state and local religious liberty issues.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) held a meeting on December 10, 2025, at the Old Parkland in Dallas, Texas.

RLC Chairman, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, led the meeting in furtherance of and alignment with the RLC's charter and mission.¹

All Commission Members attended except Pastor Paula White, Mr. Eric Metaxas, and ex-Officio Commission Members Attorney General Pamela J. Bondi, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy Vince Haley, and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Scott Turner, who were unable to attend due to travel conflicts.

This synopsis includes key highlights from the meeting.

OPENING AND WELCOMING REMARKS

Mrs. Mary Margaret Bush, the RLC Director and Designated Federal Official (DFO), opened the meeting, as required by the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Chairman Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick began the meeting and introduced the Commission.

¹ Additional information regarding RLC can be found at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/establishment-of-the-religious-liberty-commission/>.

Chairman Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick welcomed the audience and provided an introduction and an overview of the origins of the Commission.

He provided a summary of the day's agenda as well as a preview of future topics to be covered by the Commission.

United States Associate Attorney General Stanley Woodward opened the meeting with remarks regarding the history of religious liberty in the military and the Trump Administration's commitment to renewal of this legacy.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: A History of Religious Liberty in the Military

- **David Barton**

Mr. David Barton provided a historical overview of religious liberty in the military, from the time of the American Founding through the present.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: Religious Liberty in the Military – Servicemember Perspectives

- **Brandon H. Wheeler**
- **Capt. Sukhbir Singh Toor, USMC, Ret. (“Tour”)**
- **Blake Martin, Former Navy SEAL**
- **Kenny Vaughan**
- **2Lt. Harish Rao**
- **Mike Berry**

Mr. Wheeler, a U.S. Marine, provided an overview of the role of faith in military readiness and the importance of spiritual formation in fostering integrity in combat and clarity regarding the difference between good and evil.

Capt. Sukhbir Singh Toor discussed his military service and the need for accommodations for individuals of the Sikh faith so that that can maintain their articles of faith while also serving the country.

Mr. Martin, a former Navy SEAL, detailed how he was forced to leave the military and lose his pension due to his religious beliefs. After 18 years of military service, Mr. Martin applied for and was rejected for a religious exemption to the vaccine mandate. Mr. Martin received this disparate treatment even though servicemembers with other types of exemptions were permitted to remain in service.

Mr. Kenny Vaughan detailed how he had served the United States troops by providing dog tags with religious verses to soldiers entering combat through an initiative called Shields of Strength. The dog tags were well received through all administrations and were a great comfort to soldiers particularly those injured and dying. Yet, abruptly, the dog tag ministry was put to a halt when an administrative requirement was mandated requiring Shields of Strength to remove religious

references on their website and even on the product. The ministry was never able to recover fully from the setback.

Second Lieutenant Harish Rao spoke of his enrollment in the military and how he learned early on that he would not be able to honor the practices of his Hindu faith while serving. When he learned this, he decided to leave the military, not wanting to sacrifice his religious beliefs and questioning what he would be fighting for if it were not the right to practice his faith freely. A chaplain intervened and advocated for him, providing the applicable religious accommodation, and enabling him to serve with distinction. Lieutenant Rao is now in training to be a Hindu chaplain and is advocating for improvements to the chaplaincy recognition process for Hindus and other religious service members.

Mr. Berry spoke of his experience with the Marine Corps reserve in which he was abruptly cut off from benefits and service because of his religious exemptions to the vaccine. The abrupt ending of service healthcare insurance benefits was a great burden as his daughter, who has special needs, without medical coverage. Mr. Berry spoke of the need for religious accommodations for those of all faiths in the service.

Question and answer among the Commissioners and witnesses ensued.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: Religious Liberty in Public Education – Chaplain Perspectives

- **Chap. Rabbi Dresin**
- **Chap. Maj. Gen. Carver**
- **Amy Vitale**
- **Msgr. Anthony Frontiero**

Chaplain Major General Carver spoke of the importance of faith and service and the unique role played by chaplains for service members whose lifestyle is very demanding.

Chaplain Rabbi Dresin spoke of the unique challenges faced by Jewish service members, including a lack of kosher meals, and other minimal religious accommodations needed for their faith. He also mentioned that individual soldiers are very supportive of the chaplaincy, but that additional changes are needed in top leadership to facilitate the full contributions chaplains can provide.

Ms. Amy Vitale spoke of the statutory challenges in the chaplaincy and the need for legal protections restoring each chaplaincy to its full distinguished role. She highlighted three key points: (1) the Chaplaincy is necessary to fulfill the government's constitutional obligation of providing for the religious exercise of service members; (2) the role of a Chaplain is inherently religious; and (3) Chaplains are an essential part of advising the chain of command.

Monsignor Frontiero made several key points. First, he noted that religious liberty is not a luxury good but a constitutional right with direct implications for military morale, ethics, and readiness.

He spoke of the specific challenges faced by Catholic servicemembers in accessing the sacraments after a reduction in the number of Catholic chaplains contracted in the military.[].

Question and answer among the Commissioners and witnesses ensued.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: Religious Liberty in Public Education – Chaplain Perspectives

Chairman Patrick introduced the first afternoon panel:

- **Pastor Dr. Robert Jeffress**
- **Dr. Ben Lovvorn**
- **Chap. Dr. Andrew Fox**
- **Mrs. Phyllis Morris**

Pastor Dr. Robert Jeffress and Dr. Ben Lovvorn testified on their church’s experience of being targeted for investigation by the IRS under the auspices of the Johnson Amendment.

Chap. Dr. Andrew Fox testified on being removed from his role as Austin Fire Department Chaplain in response to a personal post he published related to his Christian beliefs.

Mrs. Phyllis Morris testified regarding her experience advocating for the inclusion of a Nativity scene in the town’s traditional expressive forum for holiday decorations.

Question and answer among the Commissioners and witnesses ensued.

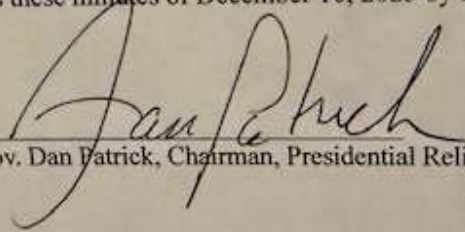
Chairman’s Closing Remarks

Chairman Patrick closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their time, efforts, and devotion. He noted that the next meeting will be held in February 2026, with more details to follow soon.

Chairman Patrick adjourned the meeting – approx. 1:40 p.m., CT

Certification of Minutes

As required by the Federal Advisory Commissions Act, Commission Chairman Dan Patrick certifies these minutes of December 10, 2025 by his signature below.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Patrick", written over a horizontal line.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Chairman, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

April 2, 2026

Date