

To: National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
2530 Crystal Drive
Suite 1000, Box #63
Arlington, Virginia 22202
25 April 2019



sojourners

Re: Docket 05-2018-01
Selective Service Hearing: Should Registration be Expanded to All Americans?
—Arguments **against** expansion

Dear Commission members,

With the recent decision to open combat positions in the U.S. armed forces to women, the morality and rights of religious freedom around Selective Service registration have returned for public scrutiny in public hearings, in the courts, and in Congress. While much of the debate has focused on issues of gender—will young women be required to register?—the problems with draft registration are extensive and worthy of more thorough consideration.

It always has been the responsibility of churches, faith communities, and pastors to serve as stewards and shepherds of conscience. The renewed interest in draft registration and the possibility of a mass registration of young women provide a perfect opening to initiate or deepen these discussions.

Sojourners, a Christian evangelical organization, has a long history of promoting a thoughtful and intelligent U.S. foreign policy built on the principles of peace, diplomacy, communication, civilian solidarity across national lines, reconciliation, restorative justice, and responding to those in need. Beginning with our anti-war efforts in the 1970s, we have brought together powerful allies who shared our belief that our nation needs to re-orient our foreign policy from unilateralism and militarism to multilateralism, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Drawing from the language and values of faith, we have successfully convinced key faith constituencies that issues like how we address terrorism, conflict prevention, and broader foreign policy concerns should be treated as “moral values” issues.

Sojourners addresses the questions on Selective Service with three key points:

1. Selective service registration impedes religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Sojourners fully supports and recognizes the right of individual conscientious objection to bearing arms and the right to be free of coerced participation in militarism and war. Sojourners supports the total disestablishment of the Selective Service System, including elimination in personnel and functions. Short of this, Sojourners supports allowing for self-identification as a conscientious objector at the point of registration as a key component of defending religious liberty.

Sojourners believes that in an age of continued war and terrorism, which dramatically affect civilian populations, every Christian must faithfully consider conscientious objection.

For many people of faith and people of conscience, questions around Selective Service registration are not new, and, ethically speaking, nothing is different now that women are considered as part of the equation. For many, the questions around Selective Service registration have long been ones of preparation for war, militarization of our communities, and coercion of individual conscience. Despite attempts to trivialize registration (“It’s just registration, it’s not the draft”), the primary purpose of registration is to be prepared for war. Lawmakers, past presidents, and the Supreme Court have all affirmed this position.

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A central tenet of the Christian's profession of faith is the proclamation of a Gospel-inspired and nonviolent peace, capable of engendering lasting trust among nations. Religious leaders appeal to the Christian faithful and to "all those of good will," to use the weapons of active nonviolence to confront and banish "whatever might endanger peace" and "transform all into witnesses of truth, justice, and love." The role of the government is not only to provide the proper material welfare of their people but also to guarantee them the fairest gift of peace.

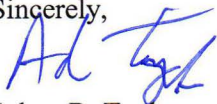
In accord with nonviolence as an authentically Christian and human mandate and practice, Sojourners fully supports and recognizes a right of individual conscientious objection to bearing arms. With other Christian leaders we state in the strongest possible terms, "it is our clear duty, therefore, to strain every muscle in working for the time when war can be completely outlawed" (Pope John XXIII, *Gaudium et Spes*). Armed or militarized response to conflict—even extreme violence—is, in most cases, an ineffective, outmoded, wasteful, and illegitimate act. In accord with nonviolence as an authentically Christian and human mandate and practice, Sojourners fully supports and recognizes a right of individual conscientious objection to bearing arms and appeals for the total disestablishment of the Selective Service System, including the elimination of personnel and functions.

2. Selective service registration in the United States is out-of-step with the rest of the world and is fiscally irresponsible. Fewer than a third of countries currently have a military draft; most exclude women, according to Pew Research Center's April 2019 report. The U.S. is one of 23 countries where the military draft is authorized but not currently implemented. In addition, the SSS budget of \$25 million is not only insufficient to meet its current mandate, but the whole war architecture under which it was built 100 years ago is outdated, leaving the U.S. more vulnerable in the event of a national emergency, rather than less.

3. Civilian mobilization in the event of a national emergency should be overseen by civilian agencies, not the Department of Defense. Investing in civilian-based defense models based on CBD policies will provide greater social resilience, increased public compliance, and is more fiscally responsible. This model of post-military weapons systems does not rely on military preparedness or weaponry. Civilian-based defense applies the power of society itself to deter and defend against internal usurpations, foreign invaders, and national emergencies. The weapons are psychological, social, economic, and political. They are wielded by the general population and the civil institutions of the society. (See Sweden's 2018 "If Crisis or War Comes" public information strategies; "Civilian Based Defense System: New Approach—Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian Experience" by Mariusz Maszkiewicz, 2015.)

Sojourners rejects the current framing that the religious response to women joining combat forces and a massive expansion of Selective Service registration can be artificially divided into conservative and liberal responses. The true issue at stake is religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and the right to be free of coerced participation in militarism and war.

Sincerely,



Adam R. Taylor
Executive director, Sojourners



Rose M. Berger
Catholic Nonviolence Initiative/Sojourners