



UNITED STATES SENATE

December 22, 2022

Admiral Linda L. Fagan, USCG
Commandant, United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King AVE SE
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Fagan,

It has come to my attention that several cadets were dismissed from the Coast Guard Academy earlier this year following the denial of their religious accommodation requests for the COVID-19 vaccine. The United States Coast Guard performs six essential missions to ensure the safety of our nation. These include maritime law enforcement, maritime response, maritime prevention, marine transportation system management, maritime security operations, and defense operations. However, these missions cannot be performed without robust and capable leadership, which the United States Coast Guard Academy provides to the fleet. The desire to serve in our nation's Coast Guard is an admirable thing and these young men and women who were dismissed, for failure to take the vaccine, should not be forced out at a time when our nation needs them the most.

As you may be aware, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 requires the Secretary of Defense to rescind the COVID-19 vaccine mandate that was authorized on August 24, 2021. I support this provision as I believe dismissing qualified individuals amid a historic recruiting shortage only hurts the ability of our armed forces to be prepared to respond to the threats emanating from around the globe today. However, I urge you not to wait for a legislative or court-ordered end to the vaccine mandate at the Academy, but instead immediately reinstate the willing young men and women back the Academy who were dismissed. I understand that the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy and West Point allowed cadets or midshipmen to continue their studies at their academies during the fall of 2022, and continue to do so, despite those cadets being unvaccinated due to religious objections. There appears to be no reason the Coast Guard Academy cadets should be treated differently.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lindsey O. Graham".

Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator

cc:

Superintendent, U.S. Coast Guard Academy Rear Admiral William Kelly