



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

**UNDER SECRETARY OF WAR**  
**4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON**  
**WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000**

DEC 10 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS

SUBJECT: Guidance to Restore Honor to Service Members Separated Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine

- References:
- (a) Executive Order 14184, "Reinstating Service Members Discharged Under the Military's COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate," January 27, 2025
  - (b) Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, "Supplemental Guidance to the Military Department Discharge Review Boards and Boards for Correction of Military / Naval Records Considering Requests from Service Members Adversely Impacted by Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination Requirements," May 7, 2025
  - (c) Secretary of War Memorandum, "Restoring Honor to Service Members Separated Under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine Mandate," December 6, 2025

Since the President of the United States issued reference (a), the Department has taken decisive actions to correct the injustices inflicted upon conscientious Service members whose careers were derailed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine mandate. Many members have applied to return to active service, and the Office of the Under Secretary of War for Personnel and Readiness (OUSW(P&R)) is eager to welcome them back.

While the Department has made great strides supporting individuals who requested relief, making amends sometimes requires taking it upon oneself to make things right. While many individuals have received discharge upgrades after applying to the Military Department Review Boards, others are still adversely impacted by less than fully Honorable service characterizations which can impact their ability to obtain employment or GI bill benefits. This is unacceptable, and it is time for the Department to take proactive steps to correct these injustices so these Service members can apply for and receive the post-service benefits that they rightly earned.

Pursuant to the reference (c), this memorandum provides guidance to ensure that any individuals who were involuntarily discharged solely for refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccine are appropriately considered for discharge upgrades. By the direction and authority of the Secretary of War, the Secretaries of the Military Departments will each complete a proactive review of the records of individuals who were involuntarily separated solely due to their refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and who received less than a fully Honorable discharge characterization.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments will take the following actions:

- **Step 1A – Identification and Validation.**

Within 30 calendar days of the date of this memorandum, the Secretaries of the Military Departments will create and validate lists of individuals who are eligible for this review.

Eligible individuals are former Service members who were involuntarily administratively separated solely<sup>1</sup> for refusing to be vaccinated under the Department's COVID-19 vaccine mandate and who received a General (Under Honorable Conditions) discharge characterization.<sup>2</sup>

To avoid duplication of efforts, the Military Departments will cross-check the names of eligible individuals with their respective Review Boards Agencies<sup>3</sup> and remove the name of any individual whose discharge characterization has already been upgraded to Honorable, or who already has an application requesting a discharge characterization upgrade pending before the Military Department's Discharge Review Board (DRB) or Board for Correction of Military / Naval Records (BCM/NR).<sup>4</sup> To avoid penalizing such individuals for taking the initiative to request discharge review, the Secretary of the Military Department concerned will direct that such existing applications (before either the DRB or the BCM/NR) are expedited for decision no later than the conclusion of this proactive review.

- **Step 1B – Identification and Resourcing of Appropriate Staffing**

The Military Department Review Boards provide essential services to Service members and veterans and are essential partners in the Department's effort to reintegrate those who were unjustly separated under the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. They have granted nearly 900 discharge upgrades to individuals who are not able to return to service and continue to provide support to our warfighters when errors or injustices (such as those created by the COVID-19 mandate) threaten careers and/or access to pay and benefits.

To ensure continuity of operations, the Secretaries of the Military Departments will identify and provide appropriate supplemental support to ensure the Review Board Agencies can accomplish a proactive review of records within 1 calendar year of the date of this memorandum, without adversely impacting existing Review Board operations or timelines. This support may include hiring freeze exemptions, expanded use of remote or telework arrangements (as necessary due to space limitations or to promote operational

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this guidance, an individual who received multiple adverse actions (e.g., letter of reprimand, Article 15, and administration separation) or whose discharge documents cite multiple violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice is considered to have been "solely" separated due to refusal to be vaccinated if the Service member's official military personnel file or other systems of record demonstrate that all adverse actions were based solely upon the refusal to obey an order to receive the vaccine (and not on other factors, e.g., collateral misconduct that may have occurred concurrent with or subsequent to the Service member's refusal).

<sup>2</sup> While Department records do not indicate that any Service member was separated under Other Than Honorable Conditions due solely to refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, any Service member discovered to meet these conditions during the identification and validation phase would also be eligible for review. Individuals who did not serve long enough to be considered for an Honorable characterization (and therefore received an uncharacterized or entry level discharge characterization), or who received a Dishonorable discharge, Bad Conduct discharge, or Dismissal via court martial, are not eligible for proactive records review, though they may still apply for relief outside of the proactive review.

<sup>3</sup> Air Force Review Boards Agency, Army Review Boards Agency, and Secretary of the Navy Council of Review Boards.

<sup>4</sup> This exclusion includes individuals who have applied for reinstatement or return to service in accordance with reference (a) as the DD-214, "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty" containing the applicable discharge characterization is voided when the individual returns to service.



efficiency), the detail of Active Component Service members, Reserve Component mobilizations, or other appropriate lines of effort.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments will report their plans to support this effort to my office within 30 calendar days of the date of this memorandum, with the goal of onboarding most supporting personnel within 90 calendar days.

- **Step 2 – Referral to Discharge Review Boards**

After identifying eligible individuals as described above, the Secretaries of the Military Departments will facilitate, on motion, the review of each former Service member's discharge records by the Military Department DRB.<sup>5</sup>

No later than 60 calendar days from the date of this memorandum, the Secretaries of the Military Departments will provide the DRBs with additional policy guidance to ensure appropriate review of these individuals' discharge documents in accordance with my office's previous direction.<sup>6</sup> To ensure an efficient, uniform process, to the extent allowed by statute, such guidance will suspend appropriate policies or regulations that require administrative or processing steps that are inconsistent with a proactive records review (e.g., initial notification of referred individuals, opt-out requirements, pre- and post-board action notifications to referred individuals, and exhaustion of administrative remedies requirements). Temporary suspension of these policies or regulations is applicable only to applications pursuant to this memorandum and should not impact the ability of any individual to seek review by a DRB or BCM/NR.

Additionally, Military Department policy guidance will facilitate the collection and verification of current addresses for, and postal mail notification of any former Service members who receive discharge upgrades through this initiative once such relief is finalized. To avoid inadvertent disclosure of personally identifiable information contained on a DD Form 214, notification letters will provide former Service members with instructions for obtaining decisional documents but will not include documents or information that, if sent to the wrong address, could result in inadvertent breaches of privacy.<sup>7</sup>

- **Step 3 – Discharge Review, Notification, and Reporting**

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<sup>5</sup> Section 1553(a) of title 10, U.S. Code, authorizes a DRB to review discharges or dismissals (other than by sentence of a general court-martial) "upon its own motion" so long as the motion or request for review is made within 15 years after the date of the discharge.

<sup>6</sup> Reference (b), which *inter alia* states "the Review Boards should generally grant a discharge upgrade request from a former Service member when: (a) the former Service member was involuntarily separated; (b) the separation was based solely on a refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccine; and (c) there are no aggravating factors in the Service member's record, such as misconduct... Review Boards should normally grant requests to upgrade the characterization of service to "honorable," change the narrative reason for enlisted separation (i.e., to "Secretarial Authority"), and change the reentry code to an immediately-eligible-to-reenter code under these specific circumstances. Officer records should be changed to have similar effect."

<sup>7</sup> In the event of a suspected or confirmed breach, the procedures for assessing and mitigating harm, as well as notifying affected individuals, will be followed to ensure compliance with Department of Defense Manual 5400.11, Volume 2, "DoD Privacy and Civil Liberties Programs: Breach Preparedness and Response Plan," May 6, 2021, as amended.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments will ensure that the DRBs review and issue decisions to every individual identified as eligible through this initiative within 1 calendar year of the date of this memorandum.<sup>8</sup> Individuals who receive relief through this initiative will be notified timely on an ongoing basis.

Starting no later than 90 days from the date of this memorandum, and by the fifth day of each month thereafter, the Secretaries of the Military Departments will report to my office the number of cases:

- Identified for referral to the DRBs in accordance with this initiative (should not change after the first report);
- Considered by the DRB;
- Issued a final decision (and notified) by the DRB;
- Granted (and denied) an upgrade to an honorable characterization of service, also providing quantifiable reasons for individuals denied an upgrade;
- Granted (and denied) an amended narrative reason for separation and associated Separation Program Designator (SPD) code, also providing quantifiable reasons for individuals denied such amendments; and
- Granted (and denied) an updated Reentry (RE) Code on the DD-214, also providing quantifiable reasons for individuals denied RC code corrections.

This reporting will continue until all referred individuals have been notified of the final decision(s) of the DRB, except for those individuals who opt out of the proactive review process by contacting the DRB to submit additional claims or evidence.

The referral of a particular case for consideration by the DRB pursuant to this proactive records review does not presume nor imply that a discharge upgrade is warranted, nor does it imply any entitlement to additional or retroactive forms of relief if military records are corrected. Rather, this referral recognizes that the Military Department DRBs are best equipped to review and make appropriate determinations regarding discharge upgrade relief, while applying existing policies including reference (b).

I am confident the work done through this new initiative will allow the Department to right the wrongs of the COVID-19 vaccine mandate and facilitate appropriate relief for Service members who served honorably, stood by their principles, and deserve to put the injustices of the COVID-19 vaccine mandate behind them.



Anthony J. Tata

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<sup>8</sup> Any individual considered for proactive records review who subsequently contacts the DRB and/or BCM/NR with additional requests, claims, or evidence (not including requests for information) is exempt from this timeline and will be processed in accordance with existing DRB and/or BCM/NR policies, as appropriate. These cases should be noted in monthly reports to OUSW(P&R).