

U.S. judge in Fort Worth blocks vaccine mandate for Navy SEALs in lawsuit against Biden

[By Kaley Johnson](#) January 03, 2022 10:15 PM



A Fort Worth judge granted an injunction Monday against the Department of Defense and the Biden Administration that temporarily halted the U.S. Navy's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

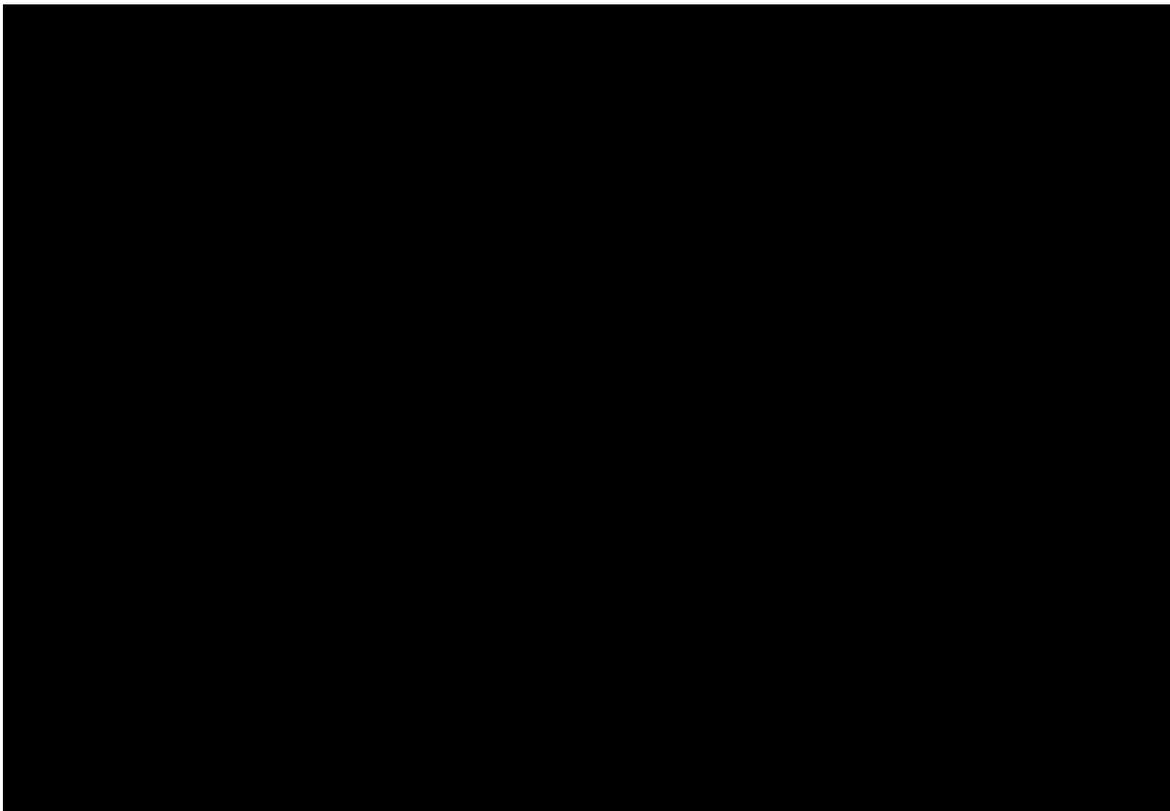
A federal judge in Fort Worth [granted an injunction Monday against the Department of Defense and the Biden Administration](#) that temporarily halted the U.S. Navy's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

The mandate is challenged by a group of U.S. Navy SEALs and other Naval special warfare personnel [who say the mandate violates their religious freedom](#) and they have been denied religious exemptions from receiving the vaccine.

U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor of the Northern District of Texas signed the injunction order after hearing testimony from several Navy SEALs in December as part of the group's lawsuit. The suit is against President Joe Biden, the Department of Defense, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro.

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"The Navy service members in this case seek to vindicate the very freedoms they have sacrificed so much to protect," O'Connor wrote in the order. "The COVID-19 pandemic provides the government no license to abrogate those freedoms. There is no COVID-19 exception to the First Amendment. There is no military exclusion from our Constitution."

The Navy implemented a mandate requiring all active-duty Navy service members to be fully vaccinated before Nov. 28 or face the "full range" of disciplinary action. While the Navy allows service members to apply for a religious exemption, O'Connor wrote in his order that the exemption process "by all accounts, it is theater."

According to the injunction order, the Navy has not granted any of the religious accommodation requests and had denied at least 29 of the 35 accommodation requests as of Dec. 17. Those with pending religious exemption requests become nondeployable.

Those seeking religious accommodations are part of the 0.6% of the Navy who have not received the vaccine, according to the order. Those who object to receiving the vaccine are Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant branches of Christianity.

According to O'Connor, the Navy's vaccine mandate causes a loss of religious liberties to those in the lawsuit.

First Liberty Institute, a nonprofit interest law firm based in Plano, is representing the SEALs and other personnel in the lawsuit.

"Forcing a service member to choose between their faith and serving their country is abhorrent to the Constitution and America's values," said Mike Berry, General Counsel for [First Liberty Institute, in a press release about the injunction](#). "Punishing SEALs for simply asking for a religious accommodation is purely vindictive and punitive. We're pleased that the court has acted to protect our brave warriors before more damage is done to our national security."

On Dec. 20, two Navy SEALs and a Navy explosive ordnance disposal technician testified before O'Connor and say they have suffered

consequences for seeking the religious exemptions that would allow them not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. At least one of the enlisted service members is in the North Texas area.

The three enlisted service members who testified Monday said they were reassigned positions in the Navy as consequences for seeking the exemptions.



Kaley Johnson is a breaking news and enterprise reporter. She majored in investigative reporting at the University of Missouri-Columbia and has a passion for bringing readers in-depth, complex stories that will impact their lives. Send your tips via email or Twitter.