

Marine Corps grants armed services' first two known religious exemptions to COVID-19 vaccine

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The Marine Corps has approved two requests to service members who are refusing the COVID-19 vaccine on religious grounds, marking what are believed to be the first known religious exemptions granted across all the armed services — out of thousands of requests.

The Pentagon has maintained the services would consider religious grounds for refusing the mandatory COVID-19 vaccine lawful order, but until now, no requests are known to have been granted. The majority of service members are fully vaccinated, but some are still seeking exemptions.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin mandated the COVID-19 vaccine in September but allowed the services to come up with their own implementation deadlines and plans to process exemption requests.

According to updates released this week from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, there have been in total over 13,000 religious exemption requests. The Air Force, which had the first vaccine deadline, has rejected 2,387 religious exemption requests and has 2,158 pending.

The religions of the two Marines who obtained exemptions from the Marine Corps are not known. A spokesperson for the Marines said the service could not provide more details for privacy reasons.

Earlier this month, a federal judge in Texas granted a temporary injunction

against the [COVID-19 mandate for Navy SEALs](#) who are seeking religious accommodations. Twenty-nine of the 35 SEALs represented in the lawsuit went through the Navy's process for religious exemptions and were denied, according to the lawsuit. Now, they're suing over the rejections.

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said this week that the Defense Department is aware of the lawsuit and is coordinating with the Justice Department on how to move forward.

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