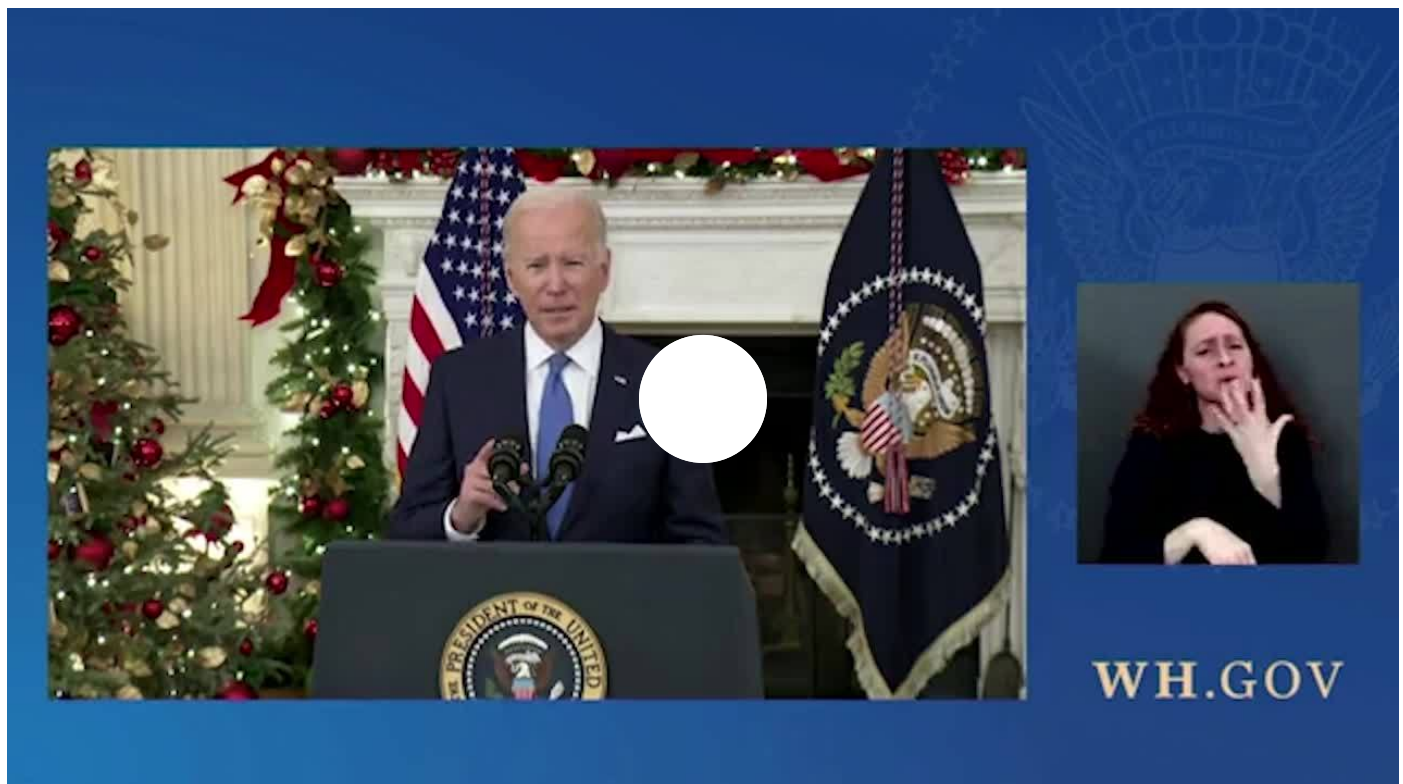


North Texas law firm seeks religious exemption from vaccine mandate for all Navy personnel

By [Domingo Ramirez Jr.](#) Updated January 24, 2022 4:24 PM



President Biden outlines plan to confront omicron surge, including at home tests

Fighting the omicron variant surging through the country, President Joe Biden announced Tuesday that the government would provide 500 million free rapid tests, increase support for hospitals under strain and redouble vaccination and boosting efforts. By The White House

Fort Worth

A North Texas law firm amended its lawsuit Monday on behalf of dozens of U.S. Navy SEALs to seek a class action that includes all U.S. Navy personnel who have requested a religious accommodation from the Navy's COVID-19

vaccine mandate.

First Liberty Institute filed the suit in Fort Worth, arguing the Department of Defense is violating the First Amendment to the Constitution, federal law and Department of Defense regulations.

If approved, the class action will protect every U.S. Navy service member who requested a religious accommodation from the vaccine mandate, the law firm said in a news release.

TOP VIDEOS

Watch More



TCU coach Jamie Dixon reacts to win over No. 19 LSU

Earlier this month, the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas issued a preliminary injunction](#), stopping the Department of Defense from

punishing Navy SEALs and Naval Special Warfare personnel who have religious objections to the department's vaccine mandate.

President Joe Biden directed on July 29 that the Department of Defense add the COVID-19 vaccine to its list of required immunizations for all service members. Weeks later, Navy officials told service members that failure to comply by Nov. 28 would result in adverse consequences.

In the Navy SEALs case, First Liberty Institute filed the lawsuit in November on behalf of 35 enlisted service members who say their rights have been violated and the mandate is unlawful.

First Liberty Institute is a nonprofit public interest law firm based in Plano that seeks to defend Americans' religious freedoms, the release said..

Earlier this month, 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 Biden, the Department of Defense, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro.

"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."

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 had 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 belong to the 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.

"Our clients are boldly leading the fight against the vaccine mandate, but no service member should face discipline or punishment for following their faith," said Mike Berry, general counsel for First Liberty Institute, in the Monday news release. "The fact that the military continues to demonstrate hostility to anyone who expresses religious objections to the vaccine mandate shows that the Biden Administration does not care about religious freedom."

This story was originally published January 24, 2022 11:47 AM.



Star-Telegram breaking news reporter Domingo Ramirez Jr. has been in journalism for more than 35 years. It's the job he has loved from day one.