

Midlothian Friends Meeting

Procedural Update

Support for Conscientious Objectors

MFM's procedural guidelines for supporting Conscientious Objector ("CO") claims are due for an update.

Michelle Schmitz reviewed our current guidelines and presented proposed changes for consideration by PSAC. Her suggestions were detailed, well thought-out, and thorough. We're thankful for her work. With some revision from Michelle's original proposal, PSAC is asking Meeting to approve the new guidelines and accompanying Minute.

Background

Federal regulations define conscientious objection as a firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form, or the bearing of arms, by reason of:

- religious training and belief, or
- personal beliefs that are purely ethical or moral in source or content and occupy in the life of a claimant a place parallel to that filled by belief in a Supreme Being for those holding more traditionally religious views.

Politics, opposition to a particular war, expediency, and self-interest are not acceptable reasons. In general, a claim of conscientious objection must reflect a deeply held and long-standing belief evidenced by the claimant's prior lifestyle and supporting documentation.

At present, all U.S. military service is voluntary. Even so, men and trans-women, age 18 through 25, who are citizens, other U.S. Nationals, lawful permanent residents, or non-citizens in the United States without a valid visa, are draft-eligible and must register with the U.S. Selective Service System. If required to register, failure to register is a felony punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 5 years. Also, a person who knowingly counsels, aids, or abets another to fail to comply with the registration requirement is subject to the same penalties.¹

Selective Service registration is a "contingency mechanism for the possibility that conscription becomes necessary." To restart the draft, a declaration of national emergency by the President and authorization by Congress are needed.

In Virginia, draft-eligibles who apply to the DMV for a learner's permit, driver's license, or special identification card must indicate on the application that they (a) are already registered with Selective Service, or (b) authorize the DMV to submit their registration information to Selective Service (once they are over 18 years of age).

If the draft is reinstated, a registrant can claim CO status only after being notified to report for induction. That claim must be filed with the local draft board before the date scheduled for induction, a period that may be as short as ten days – little time to begin building support for the claim.

¹ See <https://www.sss.gov/register/benefits-and-penalties/>

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Quaker House and similar organizations recommend that those who intend to seek CO status if drafted gather supporting documentation as soon as they reach that decision. Potential claimants are urged to send Letters of Belief to faith-based organizations (such as MFM) and collect Letters of Support from those organizations in return.

PSAC is proposing that MFM consider and adopt the following updated procedures for providing Letters of Support to those who ask for our help in asserting their conscientious objection to war.

Recommended Procedures

MFM will consider Conscientious Objector (“CO”) Letters of Belief:

- from draft-eligible men and trans-women, and all other persons regardless of gender or age,
- regardless of their religious affiliation or spiritual beliefs, who
- reside in the greater Richmond, VA metropolitan area.

Letters of Belief might explain, for example:

- how the author arrived at his or her beliefs, and
- such beliefs have influenced how he or she lives.

Letters may be delivered in person at any regularly scheduled Meeting for Worship (11 am on Sundays, 900 Preservation Road, Midlothian VA) or mailed to Midlothian Friends Meeting at PO Box 1003, Midlothian VA 23113.

The clerk of PSAC or a CO coordinator designated by PSAC will receive and acknowledge each Letter of Belief and bring it to the next PSAC meeting for consideration by the Committee.

Upon acceptance by PSAC, the Letter of Belief will be read aloud at the next Meeting for Discernment (“MfD”) by the author (preferably), a member of PSAC, or other designee. If Meeting agrees that the Letter of Belief is consistent with the Quaker Peace testimony, then:

- it will be entered into the Minutes for that MfD, and
- one of two MFM Letters of Support will be signed by the Clerk of that MfD and mailed to the author of the Letter of Belief. One Letter of Support is intended for an author related to MFM. The second is intended for an author unfamiliar to Meeting members. Samples of both Letters of Support are attached.

Letters of Belief and corresponding Letters of Support will be held together in MFM's official records. With the consent of the author, copies will also be available for reference in MFM's library.

Upon request, MFM will convene a Clearness Committee to assist potential COs who are related to the Meeting in discerning their beliefs on non-violence and war. MFM will not provide counseling or advice to those unaffiliated with the Meeting.

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We recommend that all potential COs contact Quaker House ([Quaker House | A Place of Peace in a Military City](#)) and the Center on Conscience & War ([Center on Conscience & War](#)). Both organizations offer extensive online resources, accept Letters of Belief, and may provide counseling to those attempting to navigate the process of becoming a CO.

PSAC will alert concerned organizations in the Richmond area annually of our availability to support COs.

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**Sample MFM Letter of Support
To Requesters Known to Meeting**

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear (full name):

The Midlothian Friends Meeting has received your Letter of Belief expressing your opposition to personal participation in war.

You are a member of our community, and we value your sincerity and integrity in thoughtfully discerning your own deeply held beliefs against bearing arms in warfare. We note that there is no draft at this time and few are considering how they would respond if drafted.

We have reviewed and found your Letter to be consistent with the Quaker Peace Testimony. Considering the beliefs you expressed in your Letter and our knowledge of your character, we believe you would suffer moral injury if drafted into the military and ordered to kill or harm another person.

Your Letter was read aloud to Friends assembled at our Meeting for Discernment on Sunday, _____ and subsequently recorded in our Minutes for that Meeting.

It is our understanding that if you are drafted, you intend to seek classification as a Conscientious Objector. This letter is to express our support for your claim. We will retain your Letter of Belief together with a copy of this Letter of Support in our records at the Midlothian Friends Meetinghouse.

As Quakers we believe there is a measure of the divine in each human being which makes it abhorrent to commit violence against another person.

Friend, we wish you peace and hold you in the Light.

Sincerely,

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**Sample MFM Letter of Support
To Requesters Unfamiliar to MFM**

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear (full name):

The Midlothian Friends Meeting has received your Letter of Belief expressing your opposition to personal participation in war.

We have reviewed and found your Letter to be consistent with the Quaker Peace Testimony. Your Letter was read aloud to Friends assembled at our Meeting for Discernment on Sunday, _____, and subsequently recorded in our Minutes for that Meeting.

It is our understanding that if you are drafted, you intend to seek classification as a Conscientious Objector. This letter is to express our support for your claim. We will retain your Letter of Belief together with a copy of this Letter of Support in our records at the Midlothian Friends Meetinghouse.

As Quakers, we believe there is a measure of the divine in each human being, which makes it abhorrent to commit violence against another person.

Friend, we wish you peace and hold you in the Light.

Sincerely,