

Statement to Members of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service
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National Council of Churches
Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund
Center on Conscience & War

As members of diverse faith communities who value service to God’s world, we have particular interest in the Commission’s mandate to find ways to engage communities in public service. We also are concerned about Selective Service registration and its implications for freedom of religion, belief and conscience, and equal protection under the law.

Despite often strident national conversations defending “religious liberty,” the United States has a long history of discrimination against people of faith and conscience who object to cooperation with war and the preparation for war, including Selective Service registration. It has been affirmed by all branches of the US government - the Supreme Court, Presidents, and Congress - that the primary purpose of registration with Selective Service is to be prepared for war. This means that even the act of registration can be a violation of conscience for many people of different faith traditions and beliefs. As you know, when individuals fail to register – for reasons of faith or otherwise, they can be punished, through a variety of life-altering sanctions, without due process. There is no provision under the law to accommodate religious beliefs within the current Selective Service System registration process. This must change, and the simplest way to accomplish this is to abolish the registration requirement for all.

If, following its deliberations, the Commission recommends retaining Selective Service registration, a provision to allow people to register as conscientious objectors should be initiated. This is essential to ensure that religious beliefs are accommodated. In addition, those who can no longer register because of their age should have their sanctions lifted and their full rights restored.

Also under the Commission’s consideration is the issue of national service. Many of our faith communities sponsor voluntary service programs. We applaud government programs to encourage service, such as the Peace Corps and Americorps. We oppose mandatory civilian or military service. We believe, and have learned through our experiences, that genuine service comes from the heart—not

coercion. We would hope that proposals for engaging people in service will recognize and support the many voluntary service programs that currently exist throughout our communities, rather than try to compete with them. These and other civilian-directed programs have not been funded or promoted on the same scale as military service. We believe that civilian service should be incentivized equally, with benefits similar to those offered by the Armed Forces available to all, even those whose religious beliefs prevent them from participating with war.

We look forward to seeing your proposals.

Thank you.

Signed:

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