

# U.S. Sen. Johnson: Urges pentagon to freeze COVID-19 vaccine-related discharges, reinstate discharged soldiers with backpay

Posted on Friday, Dec 16, 2022

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**WASHINGTON** – On Friday, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) joined U.S. Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) and nine of his Republican colleagues in a letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin following the Senate’s approval of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Senators urged Secretary Austin to freeze all COVID-19 vaccine-related discharges, and to establish a quick and thorough process so all members who were discharged because they refused the COVID-19 vaccine can be reinstated with back pay and full benefits.

Sen. Johnson [offered](#) an amendment to the NDAA that would have immediately ended the military COVID-19 vaccine mandate, prohibited DoD from imposing future COVID 19 vaccine mandates without Congressional authorization and allowed service members to be reinstated with back pay if they were discharged for refusing the vaccine.

“Thousands of brave men and women were harmed because of the Pentagon’s misguided approach to the COVID-19 vaccine requirement. You have the opportunity to immediately begin undoing the harm caused. For the current and future morale and benefit of our Armed Forces, we urge you to act immediately,” **the senators wrote.**

Sens. Johnson and Scott were joined on the letter by Senators James Lankford (R-Okla.), Mike Braun (R-Ind.), John Hoeven (R-N.D.), Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Mike Lee (R-Utah), Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) and

Marco Rubio (R-Fla.).

The full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below.

December 16, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd Austin

Secretary

U.S. Department of Defense

Dear Secretary Austin:

Now that the Senate has passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the legislation heads to President Biden's desk to be signed into law. This year's NDAA, which provides essential funding and sets defense and national security policy for the United States, also contains a key provision we fought for which eliminates the requirement for service members to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. While we are proud to see this needed change included, simply reversing the COVID-19 vaccine mandate is insufficient to right the wrongs done to our service members. We write today to urge immediate action from the Pentagon to protect our service members and provide much-needed direction and stability for America's brave heroes and their families.

On December 7th, NBC News cited senior military and defense officials in its reporting that discussions about allowing the reinstatement of service members discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine are underway at the Pentagon.[1] This is welcome news. The Pentagon must take every action necessary to undo the harm American service members and their families suffered when they were forcibly discharged from service. We urge you to establish a quick and thorough process so all members who were discharged because they refused the COVID-19 vaccine can be reinstated with back pay and full benefits. Doing so would provide the clarity and stability American service members and their families deserve.

Additionally, we urge you to freeze all COVID-19 vaccine-related discharges. Many service members are in limbo, and are facing discharge for their refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine just as Congress is removing the vaccine requirement. As the Secretary of Defense, you have the power to immediately end the uncertainty these members are feeling. All branches of our military are facing significant recruiting

problems, including problems arising from the vaccine requirement. Therefore, it is in our readiness and security interests to keep these brave men and women within our ranks. Moving forward with discharges over a requirement that has been rescinded by Congress would be deeply misguided.

Thousands of brave men and women were harmed because of the Pentagon's misguided approach to the COVID-19 vaccine requirement. You have the opportunity to immediately begin undoing the harm caused. For the current and future morale and benefit of our Armed Forces, we urge you to act immediately.

We appreciate your attention, and look forward to clarity from the Pentagon on this important issue.