

November 10, 2019

National Commission on Military, National and Public Service
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000, Box #63
Arlington , VA 22202

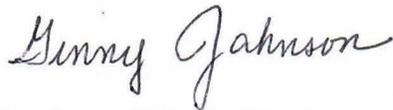
Dear Commissioners:

Rochester Friends (Quaker) Meeting (Church) approved the enclosed statement to the The National Commission at our business meeting on November 10, 2019,

Thank you for the opportunity to have input.

Approved at Meeting for Worship for Business, November 10. 2019
Rochester MN Friends Meeting

Ginny Johnson Clerk

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ginny Johnson".

Rochester Friends Meeting
PO Box 6763
Rochester, MN 55903-6763

A Response to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

Nonviolence is a basic guiding principle of the Religious Society of Friends [Quaker]. Consequently, any recommendations we offer will have as their *ultimate* goal the elimination of war and related military escalation. In that light, Rochester (MN) Friends Meeting offers the following points (followed by supporting rationale) for consideration by the Commission:

- 1. Elimination of the current Selective Service System**
- 2. Strengthening of provisions for Conscientious Objectors**
- 3. Significant reduction of the military budget**
- 4. Promotion of voluntary public service**

Supporting rationale for the above points:

1. Elimination of the current Selective Service System

The purpose of the Selective Service System (SSS) is to prepare for war, and modern warfare is nothing short of mass killing, something Friends believe is both wrong and unnecessary. Killing is a denial of our common humanity. War and the nearly worldwide extent of United States militarism is a threat to our very existence.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said on the eve of his assassination, "It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world, it is nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today." We oppose conscription for war, thus we do not favor conscription or a draft.

2. Strengthening of provisions for Conscientious Objectors

Should mandatory conscription be implemented, it should include an option for conscientious objectors. Freedom of Religion is guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. Conscientious Objection is part of the religious belief of many religious traditions besides Quakers. Further, in *United States v. Seeger*, 380 U.S. 163 (1965), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that one can also be a conscientious objector without a religious belief in a Supreme Being.

Those with religious beliefs that prohibit them from registering with the SSS face significant punitive consequences; e.g., loss of eligibility for some college loans and grants, government jobs, job training, citizenship, and in some states, driver's licenses or state IDs. We believe these facts challenge the truth of SSS Director Donald Benton's insistence that "the current system seems to work well; . . . and we believe that there's no reason to allow people to opt out before there is a need for them to show that they

are a conscientious objector.” We believe any proposed mandatory conscription *must* include an option for conscientious objectors.

3. Significant reduction of the military budget

We recommend that a large portion of the current military budget be diverted to develop alternative jobs for those in military-related industries and to study and implement known methods for nonviolence to resolve conflict. Chenoweth and Stephan, in *Why Civil Resistance Works* (Columbia University Press, 2011), demonstrate that nonviolence is twice as effective as violence in effecting regime change. Diverting military funds to nonviolent strategies makes economic sense.

4. Promotion of voluntary public service

We recommend that voluntary public service be encouraged; that it be made available as an alternative option to military service with the same benefits as those who serve in the military, supported by the military budget. One previous model is the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) from 1932 to 1942. Women could be included. Many other volunteer organizations need workers: Peace Corps, World Teach, Habitat for Humanity, AmeriCorps, and Global Community to name a few of the dozens available. Think if we had as many volunteers doing public service as we have military worldwide what that would do for the U.S. public image.