

What's happening with women and Selective Service registration?

In 2016 and again in 2021, Congress came close to approving legislation to expand the requirement to register with the Selective Service System for a possible military draft to include young women as well as young men. In 2016 and again in 2021, the expansion of draft registration was included in the annual military budget bill, but was removed only in the final House-Senate negotiations.

The expansion of draft registration to women is likely to be considered again by Congress in 2022. It's a bad idea that won't go away until Congress ends draft registration entirely.

This is a choice about militarism, not about gender equality. Expanding draft registration to women as well as men will bring about a semblance of equality in war (although women in the military will still be subject to disproportionate sexual harassment and abuse). Ending draft registration would bring about real equality in peace and freedom, and help rein in planning for unlimited war(s).

Trying to expand draft registration to young women as well as young men would mean doubling down on decades of failure of draft registration in the face of widespread noncompliance.

Since 1980, all male U.S. residents have been required to register with the Selective Service System when they turn 18, and to notify Selective Service every time they change their address until their 26th birthday. But few young men comply fully with this law. Most young men register only if and when it is required in order to get a drivers' license (in some states but not in California or some others) or some other government program. Almost nobody tells Selective Service when they move. Most draft notices would either be undeliverable or go to draftees' parents, many of whom would refuse to accept these induction notices or tear them up to protect their children.

Only 20 people have been prosecuted for refusing to register since 1980. Show trials of activists called attention to the resistance and showed that those who quietly ignored registration could not be prosecuted. The government abandoned criminal enforcement of draft registration in 1988. Resistance made registration unenforceable and made the registration list useless for an actual draft.

Women have played key roles in resistance to military conscription, even though only men were being drafted. There's a long tradition of anti-war and anti-draft feminism. Women are more likely to oppose being drafted than men have been, and more people will support their resistance.

Any draft serves war, militarism, and patriarchy. The perception that the draft is always available as a "fallback" enables planning for larger, longer, less popular wars, without regard for whether people will volunteer to fight them. Members of Congress and the public need to hear from anti-war and anti-draft feminists and from young people who oppose the draft. They need to hear from women who will resist being drafted. They need to hear from allies who will support young people in their resistance.

By preventing a draft, draft registration resisters are helping to protect us all against war. We can support them by asking our Representatives and Senators to co-sponsor the Selective Service Repeal Act and urging House and Senate Armed Services Committee members to push for hearings on this bill.

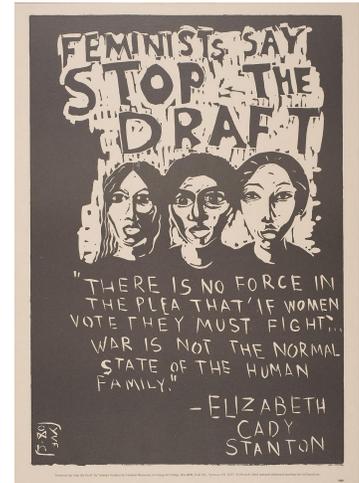
- ➔ **Support the Selective Service Repeal Act of 2021 (H.R. 2509 and S. 1139).**
- ➔ **Oppose new or expanded state laws linking drivers' licenses to draft registration.**
- ➔ **Don't register for the draft. Speak out about your refusal to register.**
- ➔ **Be an ally to young people in their resistance to draft registration.**
- ➔ **Educate, agitate, and organize against the draft and draft registration.**

For more about the draft, draft registration, and draft resistance, scan the code at the right with your phone, or see: **www.resisters.info**



“Our liberation will not be realized through war crimes. As 18- to 25-year-olds, we are within the age range to have to register with Selective Service. No matter how hard the military tries to co-opt feminism and progressive ideals, war will never be a part of a framework for imagining equity because the first casualty of war is always human dignity. As draft-age people, the only reform we support is the complete abolition of compulsory military service.” (“Expanding the Military Draft Is Not Feminism. Abolishing Draft Registration Is.” Op-Ed by Danaka Katovich and the CODEPINK Youth Peace Collective, 2021)

“Expanding Selective Service registration to women is not feminism.... Expanding the draft would merely expand a burden that has been unjustly placed on men for decades. Selective Service takes away personal choice, rewards militarism, punishes pacifism, and reproduces inequality.” (“A Feminist Take on the Selective Service”, Women’s Action for New Directions, 2021)



Poster by Yolanda V. Fundara, 1980

“While we demand equal pay for women in all areas of our economy, it is irresponsible for the fight for women's rights to seek equal moral injury, equal PTSD, equal brain injury, equal suicide rates, equal lost limbs, or equal violent tendencies that military veterans suffer from. When it comes to the military, women's equality is better served by ending draft registration for everyone. Let's not expand draft registration but abolish it.” (Statement from CODEPINK to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 2019)

“You don't stop the runaway truck of U.S. foreign policy by throwing a man in front of it, and you definitely don't stop it by throwing a man and a woman, just to make things equal.” (Lucy Steigerwald, Antiwar.com, 2016)

“There are important issues women continue to battle to achieve real, tangible equality. But finally giving them the right to fight and die under a policy they and most Americans disagree with is hardly a win.” (Kaitlyn Buss, editorial columnist, Detroit News, 2016)

“Women: do not register for the draft. No one – man or woman – should register, or be required to register, for the draft.... Did Congress think that ‘women's equality’ meant sending us off to war? Women's equality is peace, democracy, economic justice, racial justice, environmental sustainability, restorative justice, ending mass incarceration, providing for all children of this country, caring for our elders, affordable healthcare and housing, and debt-free student education. Women's equality does not – and never will – include forcing us to kill our fellow human beings in order to protect the patriarchal, oligarchic, racist, imperialistic interests of the greedy, war-profiteering few.” (Rivera Sun, 2016)

“To the liberals’ challenge, ‘If they draft men, why not draft women?’ there’s really only one answer — it’s not okay to draft men. And no, it’s not okay to draft women, and no, we don’t owe the government collusion in as patriarchal and misogynist an institution as the draft.... Whatever else it is, war is a patriarchal institution, and every war is a war against women.” (Karen Lindsey of Women Opposed to Registration and the Draft, speech at rally on Boston Common during Congressional debate on whether to include women in draft registration, 1980)

“We do not want to be drafted into the army. We do not want our young brothers to be drafted. We want them equal with us.” (Women’s Pentagon Action unity statement, 1980)

“The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom strenuously opposes the conscription of men or women for war and we oppose registration as the first step toward conscription.... Sisterhood is international. If we embrace militarism and conscription as part of equality we will be declaring our sisters as enemies.” (1980)

“I will not register for conscription, if conscription comes for women.... Instead, I publish my statement here, and if it encourages other women not to register, I shall be glad.... I shall not register because I believe modern war to be murder.... I shall not register because registration is the first step towards conscription, and the only way to do away with war is to do away with conscription.” (Dorothy Day, Catholic Worker, 1943)