



J. Kevin Stitt
Office of the Governor
State of Oklahoma

November 2, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear Secretary Austin,

I am writing to request that the Department of Defense immediately consider suspending the COVID-19 vaccine requirement for national guardsmen in Oklahoma. This mandate violates the personal freedoms of many Oklahomans, as it asks them to potentially sacrifice their personal beliefs in order to not lose their jobs. All of our national guardsmen take this calling very seriously. These are patriotic citizens who are willing to put their lives on the line to protect others in our communities during times of greatest need.

There are also practical considerations that would support a decision to suspend this requirement for a mandate. Our state experiences regular extremes in weather that create serious challenges. Last October, our state experienced an unprecedented ice storm which crippled Oklahoma for days. This past February, our state experienced some of the coldest temperatures on record that pushed our resources to the breaking point. Each spring, our state is always on alert to respond to the terrible impact that can occur from devastating tornadoes. It is during these challenging times that the National Guard is most needed. The National Guard is uniquely positioned to step up and attack the hardest problems during the harshest times.

It is very apparent that Oklahoma must always have its full contingent of national guardsmen on call to answer these challenges when they come. We estimate that over 800 Oklahoma guardsmen have not and do not plan on receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. This constitutes 10% of Oklahoma's overall force. It is irresponsible for the federal government to place mandatory vaccine obligations on Oklahoma national guardsmen which could potentially limit the number of individuals that I can call upon to assist the state during an emergency.

I sincerely ask that you reconsider the policy of mandating COVID-19 vaccination for all national guardsmen in Oklahoma. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Stitt".

J. Kevin Stitt
Governor of Oklahoma