



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
**56TH FIGHTER WING (AETC)**  
**LUKE AIR FORCE BASE AZ 85309-1629**

29 November 2021

1Lt Jonathan Y. Lightfoot  
F-16 Fighter Training Unit Student  
310<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron  
Luke Air Force Base  
Glendale, AZ 85309

The Honorable Frank Hoagland  
Ohio State Senator for District 30  
134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Senator Hoagland:

My name is Lt Jonathan Lightfoot, and I am a pilot from the 112<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron in Swanton, OH. Currently I am assigned as a student in the 310<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron at Luke AFB in Phoenix, AZ, to train to fly the F-16. I am writing to you to shed light on an instance of religious discrimination that I am currently facing. Following the Secretary of Defense's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for military members on August 24, 2021, I submitted a religious accommodation request in accordance with Air Force procedures based on my sincerely held beliefs that the use of aborted fetal cells in the testing, production, and manufacturing of vaccines goes against my moral conscience. On August 31, 2021, the 19<sup>th</sup> Air Force Commander, Major General Craig D. Wills, issued an order that removes all students from formal training while seeking religious accommodation. This Administrative Hold is against current Air Force Instructions and is clearly targeted towards deterring members from exercising their religious freedoms. As an immediate result of my application for religious accommodation submitted on September 20, 2021, I was removed from training and barred from flying, completing simulated missions, and attending academic classroom work with my class. As a life-long, devout Catholic and Air Force officer, I never thought that I would be punished for standing up for my personally held religious beliefs that I swore to defend.

It was mentioned to me that this Administrative Hold is written to maintain force readiness, but it is clear that this policy has nothing to do with health issues based on my vaccination status. Though I am not able to participate in flying or other events, I am allowed to be present every day in the squadron. I have been instructed to complete tasks such as cleaning and repairing the squadron bar and narrating for an instructor pilot's retirement ceremony. These tasks are beyond what would be expected from the other students who have maintained a regular flying schedule.

My removal from training has affected my ability to function at the elevated level I am expected to as an Air Force officer and aviator. My very personal and private views have become

a public matter, as it is obvious when I am the only student not participating in training events, and it has led to me being pressured by classmates, instructor pilots in the squadron, and my leadership. I have been ostracized as one of the few individuals with a moral and ethical objection, and my religious beliefs are called into question every day. This has created an exceedingly challenging work environment for me, and I do not feel like an accepted and valued member of the squadron or the Air Force as a whole.

This situation has been difficult on me and my wife, Sarah. With only about a month left in my F-16 training at Luke AFB, my wife and I closed on a near the 112<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron in Swanton, Ohio. We found a farmhouse in Napoleon, but the Administrative Hold took effect right as we were in the process of closing. Sarah has had to take multiple unplanned trips back to Ohio to close on the house and move in by herself, all while continuing to par for living accommodations in Arizona as well. These events are also hindering the 112<sup>th</sup> from receiving their newest F-16 pilot. The squadron only receives one or two slots each year for a potential new pilot to be returned years after hiring. Due to my delay, the unit is now burdened with a negative impact on mission readiness.

The accommodation request has still not been addressed by the approving official after almost two months since its submission. Had I continued flying and participating in syllabus events after submitting my request, I would have graduated from Basic F-16 qualification training with my class on November 5, 2021 and would be heading to the 112<sup>th</sup> to begin serving their mission. It appears this request had been regarded by leadership as something that would ultimately be denied even before the accommodation was routed for consideration. Alternatively, if approved, this delay will extend my return to Ohio well into next year.

I have spent my whole life trying to reach my dream of becoming an Air Force officer and a pilot for our great nation. I am only 9 flights away from completing training and becoming the next F-16 Fighter pilot flying out of Swanton, but I am being held back due to religious discrimination. I have been in training for the past 4 years, costing millions of dollars and countless hours of military resources and I am only weeks away from being able to contribute my new skills to protecting our country and the great state of Ohio. Unfortunately, the way that I have been treated in the past two months as a young student in my squadron, facing negative repercussions for my religious beliefs, has stifled my ability to finish my training. It has affected all areas of my life – not just my satisfaction and effectiveness at work, but also my relationships at work and home, which has impacted my mental and spiritual health and degraded my ability to contribute to this nation in the way I truly desire. I respectfully request your assistance in removing this Administrative Hold policy to allow me to continue flying so that I may continue performing at my best and soon become a worthy asset of the United States Air Force. Please help support and defend the Constitutional right that I have sworn to protect. Should you require additional information, I can be reached at 216-618-8396 or Jonny.lightfoot1@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



JONATHAN Y. LIGHTFOOT 1Lt, USANG  
Class 21-ABG, 112th Fighter Squadron, Swanton, OH