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Pentagon: No change for chaplains with gay ban repeal

by Adelle M. Banks by Religion News Service

WASHINGTON -- The pending repeal of the U.S. military's ban on openly gay members will not change policies related to chaplains, the Pentagon stated Friday (Jan. 28).

"There will be no changes regarding service member exercise of religious beliefs, nor are there any changes to policies concerning the chaplain corps of the military departments and their duties," reads a six-page memo about implementing the repeal the Don't Ask/Don't Tell policy.

It notes that chaplains will continue to be required to "care for all," and their First Amendment freedoms will remain unchanged.

"When chaplains are engaged in the performance of religious services, they may not be required to engage in practices contrary to their religious beliefs," it reads.

In November, the military issued a comprehensive review of the planned repeal and concluded "special attention" should be given to the chaplains corps because of sharp differences on the issue. But that report also concluded existing rules protecting chaplains' First Amendment rights were "adequate" for the ban's repeal.

Officials of some chaplains' organizations have opposed the repeal and questioned whether chaplains who oppose homosexuality will be protected.

The exact effective date of the repeal remains unclear, but President Obama said in his State of the Union address it would occur this year.

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