



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

19 May 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF

G-1

ATTN: DAPE-HR-L

Washington, DC 20310-0300

SUBJECT: Request for Waiver to Army Grooming Policy

1. References:

- a. AR 600-20 Army Command Policy, 18 Mar 08.
- b. AR 670-1 Wear and Appearance of Uniforms and Insignia, 03 Feb 05.

2. This memorandum is to request a waiver for the Army Grooming Policy as referenced in AR 600-20 and AR 670-1 on the grounds that my religion does not allow males to shave. Thus, compliance with the Army grooming standards would require me to violate a central tenet of my religious beliefs.

a. Like my ancestors, I am a member of the Dawoodi Bohra community of Muslims, a small division of Shia Islam that adheres to strict doctrines and religious practices. We have a centralized clergy system and our spiritual leader, His Holiness Dr. Syedna Muhammad Burhanuddin, guides and advises us in nearly every aspect of our lives. Our faith allows no exceptions to the requirement that males wear beards. Shaving is in direct violation of a major religious practice and would be a sign of disrespect to His Holiness and my community.

b. Despite the seemingly uncompromising regulations, I believe a waiver may be possible.

(1) AR 600-20, as well as a number of Army Chaplains I have spoken with, make it clear that when possible, the military will accommodate religious practices as long as the accommodation does not adversely impact the unit or the individual. As a resident physician [REDACTED] at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, a beard would not adversely impact me, my patients, or my colleagues. I have worn my beard throughout medical school without any problem.

(2) I understand that the main justification for the refusal to grant exceptions to policy is the claim that a beard would hinder the complete seal of a gas mask. My work at Walter Reed and other Washington-area hospitals over the next six years will not require me to wear a gas mask. Furthermore, the Army grants medical shaving waivers, allowing Soldiers unable to shave for medical reasons due to the disease Pseudofolliculitis barbae to keep a short and trimmed beard. Reference b, section 1-8a(2)(c). The Army therefore recognizes that keeping a beard is not inconsistent with safety.

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Respectfully, it seems that granting waivers for medical reasons but refusing them for religious reasons is an inconsistency in the policy.

3. My Chain of Command is aware of my situation and has encouraged me to contact your office to request a waiver. I want to express my commitment to the Army and my strong desire to continue serving as an Army physician. I understand and appreciate that the Army has invested a great deal of resources into my education and training, and I am proud to serve as a member of the Armed Forces. My father actually served the US Army during the Vietnam War as [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] so service in the Army is a tradition in my family. I do not wish to violate my religious convictions, which are deeply important to me. This is not an effort for me to terminate my contract with the Army; I have looked forward to being an Army physician since I joined ROTC my freshman year of college, and I am eager to use my talents and skills to heal the injuries suffered by my fellow countrymen fighting abroad. As a ROTC and HPSP scholarship recipient and now Walter Reed resident, I have a long career in the Army ahead of me. I sincerely hope a solution can be reached that will allow me to fulfill my commitment to serve the Army, while at the same time allowing me to practice my religion. My goal here is to serve my country while at the same time maintain my commitment to God. I greatly appreciate your consideration of this waiver and any other guidance you have to offer.

4. I graduated from [REDACTED] and report for duty at Walter Reed Army Medical Center [REDACTED]. Because of the nature of medical residencies, that start date cannot be delayed. I therefore request your very prompt consideration of this urgent matter. I apologize for submitting it at this late date. However, when I first requested a waiver and was denied, I was not informed that I could submit to Army G-1 for further consideration of the matter.

5. Point of Contact is [REDACTED]

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]
CPT, US Army
Medical Corps

9 Encls

1. Email Response from commander
2. Chaplain Peters' Memo
3. Chaplain Khan's Memo
4. Support Letter from Religious Expert
5. Support Letter from Religious Leader
6. Letter written to Congressman
7. Response from Congressman
8. Letter written to Senator
9. Response from Senator