

September 25, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chair
Senate Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chair
House Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Reed, Chair Rogers, Ranking Member Wicker, and Ranking Member Smith,

As you negotiate the final language of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (NDAA), we, the undersigned organizations, write to urge you to excise concerning provisions to automate Selective Service registration (Sec. 598A of S. 4638 and Sec 531 of H.R. 8070) and to expand registration to women (Sec. 598C of S. 4638). Rather than look towards automation and expansion of Selective Service registration, the time has come to abolish it entirely.

Automating Selective Service registration would not resolve the long-standing issues of Selective Service, but instead engender new ones. The provisions in the NDAA, which require a fully automated registration system based on other Federal records, would likely create a registration list even more unfit for its purpose due to inaccurate and incomplete information about draft eligibility or current locations. For example, draft-age but draft-ineligible foreign students and workers with visas, who are considered “temporary” non-immigrant U.S. residents, could be caught up in automated registration based on employment data or driver’s license data. While the Selective Service System tries to identify non-immigrant visa holders by cross-referencing driver’s license data with data obtained from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, it is an inherently unreliable process.

Section 598C of the Senate NDAA, which would expand draft registration to women, does not represent a move forward for gender equality. Instead, it represents a move backward, imposing on young women a burden that young men have had to bear unjustly for decades – a burden that no young person should be forced to bear. No true equality can spring from a policy of compelling violence.

Further, the mere existence of Selective Service creates a prospect of war. The perceived availability of a draft enables planning for unlimited wars, without having to worry about whether people will be willing to fight them. We should tear down, rather than buttress, systems which discolor our national decision-making and give rise to publicly unsupported and unpopular ‘forever wars’ and wars of imperialism.

Automation would impede the right of conscientious objectors with deeply held religious or moral objections to registration for Selective Service to resist being forcibly enlisted into the military. Restricting the rights of citizens to express their religious convictions runs counter to the founding values of the United States.

Forcing any person to engage in violence against their will, particularly as part of a war they don't believe in, is fundamentally wrong. Instead of compelling young people to fight in disastrous wars of the future, Congress must focus on strengthening peacebuilding and diplomacy to ensure such wars never occur in the first place. This necessarily begins with the abolition, and not the automation, of Selective Service.

We urge your removal of the unjust and impractical provisions to automate Selective Service registration (Sec. 598A of S. 4638 and Sec 531 of H.R. 8070) and to expand registration to women (Sec. 598C of S. 4638). We urge you to consider S.Amdt. 2183 offered by Senator Ron Wyden (OR) to repeal the Military Selective Service Act (50 U.S.C. 3801).

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. Please feel free to be in touch with questions. We look forward to continued discussion of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Center on Conscience & War
Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft
Education Not Arms Coalition
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hindus for Human Rights
International Peace Research Association
Klimaski & Associates, P.C.
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild
National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church, (USA), Office of Public Witness
Resisters.info
United Church of Christ