

Air force issues guidelines on faith: Critics say action as well as words needed

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The U.S. Air Force has released new guidelines urging its military members and civilian employees to protect the free exercise of religion by not favoring one religion over another, or even over “nonreligion.”

Issued August 29 and subject to final review this fall by base commanders, the guidelines were requested by a June report that investigated the religious climate at the Air Force Academy. The guidelines will affect the entire air force, said a spokesperson.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Washington-based Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, called the guidelines “a welcome and necessary step toward addressing the recent and troubling reports of anti-Semitism and religious discrimination within the corps.” But he added, “Their true value will not be realized until they are fully implemented.”

But Mikey Weinstein, an academy graduate and critic of the institution’s religious practices, said the new rules are insufficient. “Until the air force begins to seriously, honestly and openly address the unconstitutional proselytizing at the academy and its bases, these guidelines are only a set of nice words,” he said in a statement. “Our airmen and women deserve action.”

The guidelines relate to several issues. “Public prayer should not usually be included in official settings such as staff meetings, office meetings, classes, or officially sanctioned activities such as sports events or practice sessions,” the guidelines read. During special, “nonroutine” ceremonies, such as changes of command, “a brief nonsectarian prayer” is permitted, the guidelines say. *—Religion News Service*