

BRAD R. WENSTRUP

2ND DISTRICT OHIO

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND
MEANS

PERMANENT SELECT
COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE

WWW.WENSTRUP.HOUSE.GOV



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

2419 RAYBURN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3164

7954 BEECHMONT AVENUE
SUITE 200
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45255
(513) 474-7777

170 NORTH MAIN STREET
PEEBLES, OHIO 45660
(513) 605-1380

August 6, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

I understand that you may be considering seeking a presidential waiver to make COVID-19 vaccines mandatory for all Active Duty servicemembers in the near future. As a doctor and a Member of Congress, I have been working with my colleagues and within my community to educate those who may have questions about the safety and efficacy of these life-saving vaccines. As a servicemember, I also understand how critical COVID-19 vaccine uptake can be to maintaining readiness throughout our Armed Forces.

However, I write today to respectfully request that you reconsider seeking this waiver to make these COVID-19 vaccines mandatory before full approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Public reporting indicates that the FDA is currently reviewing the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines to make a decision regarding full approval, and the timeline for a decision regarding at least one of the COVID-19 vaccines currently available under Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) may be within the next few weeks. President Biden recently commented that he expected a fully approved vaccine in early fall, and reports by *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* indicate that full approval could come as early as Labor Day – approximately four weeks from now.^{1, 2}

As you know, vaccine hesitancy is a problem across our country that impacts civilians and servicemembers alike. As a co-Chair of the GOP Doctors Caucus, I have worked extensively with my colleagues to combat vaccine hesitancy. We have worked on Public Service Announcements to encourage vaccination, vaccinated individuals in our communities, and disseminated educational materials about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines to Members of Congress and our constituents. I understand there is still much work left to do to educate those who still hesitate to receive the vaccine for any myriad of reasons.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/03/us/politics/pfizer-vaccine-approval.html>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fda-weighs-faster-timeline-for-approving-pfizer-vaccine-11628107298>

However, I am concerned that mandating that our servicemembers take the vaccine before it is granted full approval by the FDA will unintentionally make these efforts to inform and combat vaccine hesitancy even more difficult. I also believe doing so could negatively impact servicemembers' morale. While the COVID-19 vaccines remain available only under EUA, I would encourage you to offer incentives to take the vaccine as opposed to mandates.

When the vaccine was made available to me, I did not hesitate to sign up to receive it because I know that these vaccines are safe, effective, and went through the same rigorous development processes as other vaccines on the market. Should the Department of Defense consider making the COVID-19 vaccines mandatory for servicemembers once they are granted full approval by the FDA, I would support that decision as well.

However, consistent with applicable statutes and regulations, I ask that you give fair and full consideration of these concerns with mandating the vaccine while it is still under EUA. If you would like to discuss this issue further, I would welcome the opportunity to do so.

Thank you for your service to our nation and for your commitment to our Armed Forces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad R. Wenstrup". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Brad R. Wenstrup, D.P.M
Member of Congress