SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON

19 MAY 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Army Directive 2026-09 (Grooming Standards and Religious Accommodation)

1. References.

a. Secretary of War memorandum (Guidance on Grooming Standards for Facial Hair and Religious Liberty), 11 March 2026

b. Secretary of War memorandum (Grooming Standards for Facial Hair Implementation), 30 September 2025

c. Department of Defense Instruction 1300.17 (Religious Liberty in the Military Services), 1 September 2020

d. Army Directive 2025-13 (Facial Hair Grooming Standards), 7 July 2025

e. Army Regulation (AR) 600–20 (Army Command Policy), 15 April 2026

f. AR 670–1 (Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia), 26 January 2021

2. Purpose. This directive updates policy on grooming standards for facial hair and prescribes processes that commanders will follow when reviewing all uniform, grooming, and appearance religious accommodation (RA) requests. Adherence to these standards and discipline are tied to operational readiness.

3. Applicability. This directive applies to the Regular Army, Army National Guard (ARNG)/ Army National Guard of the United States, and U.S. Army Reserve (USAR).

4. Policy. All Soldiers will meet the standards outlined in this directive and reference 1d, which build on and, where applicable, supersede the provisions of references 1e and 1f. Strict grooming and appearance compliance ensures personnel can safely and effectively employ protective equipment. This is critical not only for defense against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats, but also for firefighting, disaster relief, and other hazardous mission sets where respiratory protection may be required, often on short notice. All current approved uniform, grooming, and appearance RAs will be reevaluated, and ongoing uniform, grooming, and appearance RA requests will be resubmitted pursuant to the provisions of this directive.

a. Sideburn Grooming Standards.

(1) All male Soldiers will maintain a clean-shaven face when in uniform or on duty in civilian attire in accordance with reference 1f. Mustaches remain authorized.

(2) Effective immediately, sideburns will be trimmed to above the opening of the ear canal.

b. Religious Accommodation for Uniform, Grooming, and Appearance.

(1) The Army defines religion as a personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs, and practices that are held with the strength of traditional religious views, characterized by ardor or faith, and generally evidenced through specific religious observances. A religious exercise includes any exercise of religion, whether or not compelled by, or central to, a system of religious belief.

(2) Variance from the uniform, grooming, and appearance standards contained in references 1d and 1f is generally not authorized. When requesting an RA that requires accommodation from uniform, grooming, and appearance standards, the Soldier is responsible for demonstrating a sincerely held religious belief and that Army policy substantially burdens the Soldier's religious exercise. Soldiers may request an RA based on a sincerely held religious belief only; secular beliefs, no matter how sincerely or closely held, are not grounds for accommodation.

(3) Accessions applicants, including reentry candidates, must comply with the grooming standards outlined in this directive and reference 1f or have an approved RA prior to entry or reentry. An accessions applicant is defined as an individual who has made a request before any of the following occur: contracting for enlistment, contracting in a senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, accepting appointment to the United States Military Academy, or accepting appointment through direct commission. Applicants unable to comply will be deferred from accession until standards are met, either by compliance with grooming standards or approved RA.

(4) Absent an approved RA, temporary medical profile, or modification of grooming standards based on validated mission-essential requirements, non-compliance with uniform, grooming, and appearance standards may result in initiation of administrative separation.

c. Reevaluation of All Currently Approved RA Requests.

(1) All previously approved uniform, grooming, and appearance RA requests will be resubmitted for review in accordance with the implementation guidelines outlined in paragraph 4d and enclosure 1 of this directive. Guidelines for worship and dietary practice accommodation remain unchanged.

(2) All uniform, grooming, and appearance RAs approved prior to the date of this directive remain valid until a final decision is rendered by the approval authority. The accommodation remains in effect throughout the entire reevaluation process, regardless of duration. During the review, Soldiers are not required to alter their uniform, grooming, and appearance practices and may continue to comply with the provisions of their previously approved RA until they receive official notification of a final decision. If, after review, the approval authority disapproves the RA request, the accommodation is then rescinded, and the Soldier must conform with uniform, grooming, and appearance standards in accordance with references 1d and 1f within 24 hours of notification of denial.

d. Phased RA Request Evaluation Process. The consideration of new RA requests and the reevaluation of RA requests approved prior to the date of this directive will occur in three distinct phases as outlined below.

(1) Phase 1—Reevaluation of Currently Approved Facial Hair RA Requests.

(a) This phase commences immediately on publication of this directive. Pursuant to reference 1c, this directive serves as written notification that a review of previously approved RA requests is being initiated.

(b) No later than 120 calendar days from the publication of this directive, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASA (M&RA)) will approve or disapprove all facial hair RA requests submitted for reevaluation.

(2) Phase 2—Reevaluation of Currently Approved Appearance and Uniform RA Requests. This includes, but is not limited to, uncut hair, all types of religious headgear (such as hijabs, turbans, patkas, kufis, and feathers); religious jewelry, apparel, or articles with religious significance that do not meet the criteria for wear in AR 670–1; modesty items (such as leggings); and tattoos.

(a) This phase commences no earlier than 120 days from publication of this directive. Pursuant to reference 1c, this directive serves as written notification that a review of previously approved RAs is being initiated.

(b) No later than 240 calendar days from the publication of this directive, the ASA (M&RA) will approve or disapprove all appearance and uniform RA requests submitted for reevaluation.

(3) Phase 3—Steady-state Evaluation of New Uniform, Grooming, and Appearance RA requests. This phase represents the return to steady-state processing for all new RA requests following the completion of Phases 1 and 2. Steady-state processing is expected to commence once the ASA (M&RA) completes both reevaluation phases. In the interim, commands will continue to receive, process, and route all new requests to the approval authority without delay.

e. Implementation Guidelines and Processing Instructions.

(1) RA Requests. When making a request, Soldiers must sign a written Department of the Army (DA) Form 2823 (sworn statement) under oath. This oath must be administered by a commissioned officer authorized under Article 136 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), such as any judge advocate; any adjutant or personnel section (S1); any commanding officer; or any officer designated as a notary public. In this statement, Soldiers affirm that their belief is sincerely held and religious in nature. False statements may be subject to disciplinary action under Article 107 of the UCMJ (False official statements) or denial of accession as appropriate. Each request must adhere to the guidelines prescribed at enclosure 1 of this directive.

(2) Routing. RA requests will be routed via a personnel action request (PAR) submission in the Integrated Personnel and Pay System (IPPS-A) for approval by the ASA (M&RA). Step-by-step submission instructions in the *RA Request Training Guide* will be available at: https://ipps-a.army.mil/Training/

(3) Chaplain Interview Guidelines.

(a) Chaplains are the command teams' subject matter experts on religion, and they advise on religious accommodation. All RA requests require a formal and nonconfidential interview with a chaplain. When operationally feasible, the interview will occur at least one level higher than the unit of the Soldier requesting an accommodation. The interviewing chaplain will provide a memorandum stating that the interview occurred and address the religious basis and sincerity of the religious belief.

(b) Interviewing chaplains will use the Religious Basis Tool (RBT) and Sincerity Tool (ST) at enclosures 2 and 3 of this directive to assist with assessing sincerity and the religious basis for a request.

(c) The interviewing chaplain's RA memorandum will provide a thorough summary of the interview, with relevant details of the Soldier's religious basis for the request and sincerity of belief, to best inform commanders.

(d) The interviewing chaplain's technical supervisor or equivalent will review the interviewing chaplain's RA interview memorandum to ensure the memorandum thoroughly discusses the religious basis and thoroughly evaluates the requestor's sincerity of belief.

(4) Processing RA Requests.

(a) The immediate (lowest level) commander will review the final chaplain memorandum and complete a recommendation memorandum. At a minimum, commanders will assess the sincerity of the Soldier's belief and provide relevant details of the Soldier's duties;

current and anticipated work environment; required protective equipment; and scheduled deployments, exercises, or assignments. The commander's and chaplain's memorandums will be uploaded to the PAR in IPPS-A for routing to a commander at the O-5 level.

(b) Units and commands are authorized to establish routing chains for RA requests that may not include all levels of intermediate commanders. At a minimum, requests must go via IPPS-A through the immediate (lowest level) commander, the O-5 commander, and the GCMCA for Active Component (AC) Soldiers or first general officer in the chain of command for ARNG and USAR Soldiers.

(c) The GCMCA (AC) or first general officer in the chain of command (ARNG and USAR) will thoroughly review the applicant's entire case for completion and return to the applicant's commander any applications that are missing required documents. After considering the totality of the record and individually evaluating the application, the GCMCA (AC) or first general officer in the chain of command (ARNG and USAR) will recommend approval or disapproval of the RA request. Although coordination with HQDA is no longer required, commands may consult with Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) technical experts, such as those in the Office of the Chief of Chaplains (OCCH) and the Office of The Judge Advocate General (OTJAG).

(d) The GCMCA's recommendation will be routed via IPPS-A to the Military Policy Integration Division within the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCS), G-1 for staffing to the ASA (M&RA). The ASA (M&RA) is the approval authority for all uniform, grooming, and appearance RA requests.

(e) The decision of the ASA (M&RA) will be actioned in IPPS-A, and a copy of the PAR will automatically be uploaded to the interactive Personnel Electronic Records Management System (iPERMS) for filing in the Soldier's Army Military Human Resource Record (AMHRR).

(5) Approvals. Soldiers with an approved RA request for facial hair will be automatically coded in IPPS-A with code "ACREWA." Soldiers with an approved request for all other uniform, grooming, or appearance accommodation will automatically be coded in IPPS-A with code "ACUGRE." This includes, but is not limited to, uncut hair; all types of religious headgear (such as hijabs, turbans, patkas, kufis, and feathers); jewelry, apparel, or articles with religious significance that do not meet the criteria for wear in AR 670–1; modesty items (such as leggings); and tattoos.

(6) Disapprovals. Soldiers with a disapproved request for facial hair accommodation will be automatically coded in IPPS-A with code "ACDHHNT." Soldiers with a disapproved request for all other uniform, grooming, or appearance accommodation will be automatically coded in IPPS-A with code "ACDHJTS." Soldiers whose RA requests are disapproved must continue to comport to uniform, grooming, and appearance standards. If a previously approved

RA is rescinded after review, Soldiers will be required to comport to uniform, grooming, and appearance standards within 24 hours of their notification. Disapproval of sincerely held religious beliefs requires a written decision memo that must include a clear explanation of operational risks and concerns, citations to relevant studies or standards, analysis of alternatives and why they were deemed insufficient, and an explanation of how the decision is no less restrictive than exemptions based on non-religious reasons (for example, medical).

(7) Separation. Absent an approved RA, temporary medical profile, or modification of grooming standards based on validated mission-essential requirements, non-compliance with uniform, grooming, and appearance standards may result in initiation of administrative separation.

(8) Modification or Suspension. Pursuant to reference 1c, when the commander of a Soldier with any type of RA identifies a specific threat to health and safety based on the Soldier's RA (for example, the threat of exposure to toxic CBRN agents that may merit a heightened protective posture), the commander will notify the Soldier of the need to modify or suspend the RA, the basis for the modification/suspension, and the date the modification/ suspension will likely go into effect.

(9) Issues of Sincerity. When the commander of a Soldier with an RA identifies an issue of sincerity following an approved RA, the commander will forward the issue of sincerity to the GCMCA (AC) or first general officer in the chain of command (ARNG and USAR), who will determine whether an issue of sincerity exists and may direct the RA for review and rescission in accordance with reference 1c.

5. Responsibilities.

a. The DCS, G-1 will maintain accountability of the disposition of requests for RA permitting facial hair and will publish procedures for reporting to the DCS, G-1 all changes in circumstances, including anticipated operational requirements, that merit reevaluation of approved requests.

b. The Chief of Chaplains will—

(1) Develop and publish training on the proper use of enclosures 2 and 3 within 15 calendar days of the publication of this directive.

(2) Ensure the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps is educated on this directive and prepared to advise and assist approval authorities with good faith determinations in support of RA requests.

(3) Support commander requests, including direct communication for HQDA chaplains to interview Soldiers regarding RA requests, as needed.

c. The Judge Advocate General (TJAG) will—

(1) Review religious accommodation training and provide legal reviews of religious accommodation requests and waivers.

(2) Support commander requests for consultation, including direct communication from servicing judge advocates general, as needed.

6. Proponent. The ASA (M&RA) has oversight responsibility for this policy. The DCS, G-1 will incorporate its provisions into AR 600–20 and AR 670–1 within 2 years of the date of this directive.

7. Duration. This directive is rescinded on publication of the revised regulations.



Dan Driscoll

Encls

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UNIFORM, GROOMING, AND APPEARANCE: PROCEDURES FOR REQUESTING RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

1. General Principles.

a. Determination of Sincerity. The central question is whether the Soldier's religious beliefs are sincerely held. Commanders, chaplains, and reviewing authorities should look at the Soldier's overall conduct—past and present—to determine whether the stated beliefs consistently guide the Soldier's actions. This includes reviewing the application, supporting documents, demeanor, and observable behavior. Requests that do not show a consistent link between the asserted beliefs and the Soldier's actions, or that appear driven by convenience or avoidance of Army standards, may be disapproved.

b. Relevant Decision Factors. In assessing sincerity, commanders may consider factors such as the Soldier's religious background and training, participation in religious practices, study or reflection supporting the belief, credibility of the Soldier and any supporting statements, and consistency between the Soldier's conduct and claimed beliefs. Commanders may also rely on their personal knowledge of the Soldier's behavior and statements. No single factor is determinative; commanders should evaluate the totality of the circumstances.

c. Mitigating Factors Warranting Further Inquiry. Some circumstances, such as requests based on non-religious reasons or those submitted shortly after a policy change, may warrant additional inquiry into sincerity. These factors alone are not sufficient to deny a request and must be supported by other evidence before recommending disapproval.

2. Religious Accommodation Request.

a. Soldiers will submit all uniform, grooming, and appearance RA requests via self-initiated PAR through IPPS-A to their immediate (lowest level) commander, accompanied by a signed DA Form 2823 (sworn statement) attesting to the following:

(1) full name and DoD ID number

(2) religious denomination or tradition of the applicant

(3) description or explanation of the following matters:

(a) nature of the belief that requires the applicant to seek RA

(b) how the applicants' beliefs changed or developed, including an explanation of factors (how, when, and from whom or from what source training was received or belief acquired) that caused the change in or development of beliefs requiring RA

(c) when and why these beliefs became incompatible with the applicable military standard

(4) detailed statement as to the applicants' beliefs, addressing the following items (as applicable):

(a) name of the belief and the name and location of its governing body or head, if known

(b) name and location of any religious organization, congregation, or meeting that the applicant customarily attends and the extent of the applicant active participation therein, including the name, title, and present address of the pastor or leader of such religious organizations, congregation, or meeting

(c) how the current military standard burdens their exercise of religion

(d) description of the creed or official statements as they pertain to the requested RA

(5) additional information, such as a letter of reference or official statements of the organization to which the applicant belongs/applicant names in the application

(6) any other relevant items that the applicant desires to submit in support of the application

b. Non-unit Soldiers (Individual Ready Reserve and Standby Reserve) will submit their applications via assigned and dated DA Form 4187 (Personnel Action) to the Commander, U.S. Army Human Resources Command; 1600 Spearhead Division Avenue; Fort Knox, KY 40122–5100. Officers include office code (AHRC-OPL-P). Enlisted Soldiers include office code (AHRC-EPO).

c. A pre-accession request is defined as a request submitted before any of the following occur: contracting for enlistment, contracting in a senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, accepting appointment to the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), or accepting appointment through direct commission. The chain of command routing for pre-accessions requests will be established by each accessions agency and command up to the ASA (M&RA). Pre-accession applicants will submit their applications in accordance with instructions from their respective accessions agencies.

3. Chain of Command Actions. The applicant's chain of command will ensure—

a. The application is processed expeditiously.

b. All people involved in the application process are familiar with their respective responsibilities. At the time of application, the immediate (lowest level) commander will counsel the applicant on the RA process. The applicant will sign and date acknowledging this counseling.

c. An operational assessment is included. At a minimum, the immediate (lowest level) commander will assess the sincerity of the Soldier's belief and provide relevant details of the

Soldier's duties; current and anticipated work environment; required protective equipment; and scheduled deployments, exercises, or assignments. The recommendation will evaluate the operational impact of the request, including effects on mission readiness; the fit, function, and safety of required protective equipment; role-specific requirements for emergency response, combat, or hazardous material handling; the feasibility of alternative accommodations; and overall safety implications in relation to unit requirements.

4. Chaplain Interview.

a. All applicants for RA will be interviewed by an Army chaplain. When operationally feasible, the interview will occur at least one level higher than the unit of the Soldier requesting an accommodation. The interviewing chaplain will provide a memorandum stating that the interview occurred and address the religious basis and sincerity of the religious belief. The chaplain may recommend approval or disapproval but is not required to do so. Chaplains will use the Religious Basis Tool (RBT) and Sincerity Tool (ST) to assist with assessing sincerity and the religious basis for a request.

b. Before interviewing applicants, the chaplain will advise the applicant that any communication between the applicant and chaplain will not be privileged because a detailed report of the interview will become a part of the application for consideration in the adjudication process. Thus, if the applicant has established a relationship of confidentiality (counseling) with a chaplain, a different chaplain will conduct the interview. This provision does not prevent an applicant from soliciting a letter to support the claim from anyone the applicant chooses.

c. The interviewing chaplain will submit a detailed report of the interview to the commander. This report will include comments on the following:

(1) nature and basis of the applicant's claim

(2) opinion on the source of the applicant's religious belief, including whether the belief is religious or secular in nature

(3) opinion as to the sincerity of the applicant's belief

(4) appropriate comments on the applicant's demeanor and lifestyle as they bear on the claim

(5) specific reasons for the chaplain's conclusions (For example, if the interviewing chaplain feels the applicant is insincere in belief or that the applicant's lifestyle is incongruent with the claim, the chaplain should include statements to this effect in the report.)

d. If the applicant refuses to be interviewed by a chaplain, the chaplain will submit a report explaining the circumstances. Appropriate comments on the applicant's demeanor as it bears on the claim will be included.

RELIGIOUS BASIS TOOL FOR UNIFORM, GROOMING, AND APPEARANCE RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

1. Discuss the Soldier's beliefs to understand the Soldier's faith group, beliefs, or system of values serving as the basis for the religious accommodation request. Apply the following definition from Army Regulation (AR) 600–20 to foster understanding during the interview process (see also Department of the Army Pamphlet 165–19, paragraph 2–3c, and Field Manual 7-22, paragraph 10-7):

> Religion is a personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs, and practices held with the strength of traditional views, characterized by ardor and faith, and generally evidenced through specific observances.

Soldier's Stated Faith Group and/or Religious/Spiritual/Personal Belief:

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2. Interview the Soldier to understand the religious basis. Questions and interview prompts will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is your religious preference, and is it correctly reflected in your official military record?
- Describe in detail your request and your main reason for the request.
- Describe the connection between the requested religious accommodation request and your religious/personal system of attitudes, morals, or ethical beliefs.
- Why do you believe that your requested accommodation is a necessary "specific observance" that "generally evidences" your religion/belief system (further explained in AR 600–20)?
- Why do you understand your requested accommodation to be encouraged, required, or necessary by your religious/personal beliefs?
- How does military service/regulation interfere with the practice of your religion?
- What is the practical, ethical, or spiritual impact you anticipate if you were denied this religious accommodation?

SINCERITY TOOL FOR ALL UNIFORM, GROOMING AND APPEARANCE RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS

1. The absence or presence of any specific factor below does not automatically render a request for religious accommodation sincere or insincere. Every request must receive an individual assessment based on the facts presented by the Soldier making the request and evaluated consistent with law and policy. The sincerity evaluation focuses on whether the belief is genuinely held by the Soldier rather than the validity (or religious nature) of the belief itself.

2. Consider the following:

- Does the Soldier observe certain holidays/holy days/specific seasons and dates that align with the stated faith/belief?
- Is the Soldier actively engaged in training, study, contemplation, or other activity related to the stated faith/belief?
- Does the Soldier keep dietary practices related to the stated faith/belief?
- Can the Soldier articulate a personal experience of the circumstances of when and why the Soldier converted to/chose to follow the system of faith/belief?
- Has the Soldier acted in a manner inconsistent with the professed faith/belief? Note that perfect adherence is not required to demonstrate sincerity.
- Does the Soldier attend gatherings and/or is the Soldier a member of a community of the stated faith/belief?
- Does the Soldier give alms, tithes, or financially contribute to the furtherance of the stated faith/belief?
- Does the Soldier utilize personal talents to further self and others as an expression of the stated faith/belief?
- Does the timing of the request raise questions? Does the request coincide with other events that might suggest ulterior motives, such as a post hoc action to avoid discipline?