



Registration for the Draft in the United States and Steps Young People May Take

Is what you see what you get?

Despite the glamour and supposed benefits (such as education and training) that today's multi-billion dollar military recruiting programs advertise, the primary purpose of the military is still war. Although only a small percentage of young people enter the military, all men, at age 18, are required by law to participate in the military system by registering for the draft (through the Selective Service System). In the future Congress could also require women to register.

What exactly is the draft?

Draft registration was reinstated in 1980 as a political threat to the Soviet Union. It exists in order to mobilize troops quickly in the event of a major war. Currently, there is no draft. In the case of a national emergency, Congress would have to authorize the President to begin induction in order to restart the draft.

What are my choices?

Can I register as a conscientious objector (CO)?

In reality, there are only two choices: either you register or you don't. There is no box to check for "conscientious objector." Registration collects addresses; it does not make classifications (about whether people can serve and in what capacity). Only soldiers (active or reserve duty) who ultimately find their service in the armed forces unconscionable can actually "file" for CO status. Civilians cannot register.

Choosing to register carries the obvious risk of being drafted should the draft start again. Only after you've been called up could you try to obtain a "deferment" (a postponement of military service) or an "exemption" (a release from military service). If this were to happen, you would have only a very short time to prepare a CO or any other kind of claim, which is why it is important that you begin to consider these questions now. (There are other types of exemptions besides CO.)

The other choice is not to register. Some young men believe that they cannot be part of the military system or war machine at all. The consequences of not registering can include fines and prison time, but the government has not imposed these penalties since the mid-1980s and is unlikely to do so. Instead, coercive federal and state laws deny benefits, such as federal financial aid and certain job training, to young men who have not registered.

These consequences may make it difficult to go to school. Therefore, some people choose to register and write messages stating "I am a conscientious objector" in the margins of their registration form. These messages do not necessarily have any legal significance. (Note that FEAT — see reverse side of this resource — and a small number of Quaker colleges provide some monetary assistance for non-registrants.)

What can I do now?

Young people need to ask important questions rather than simply filling out what seems like just another form that has no particular immediate consequences. For example, ask yourself, "What do I believe about war?" If you believe that war is morally unacceptable and that it violates your deepest beliefs or that there are certain things that you could not do, you are certainly not alone.

Many young people feel this way. If you are trying to decide what to do, or if you have decided to register, there are some steps you can take that might help you to establish your claim as a CO. Although you don't have to know what you would do in every situation, these steps can also help you clarify your thought. You can prepare a CO statement using questions similar to the ones the military asks, such as

- Describe the beliefs and values which are the basis for your claim as a CO.
- Why do these values conflict with war?
- How did you get these beliefs?
- How do they affect the way you live or what type of work you might plan to do?

You can begin a file containing the answers to these questions, a copy of your draft registration form (if you registered), letters that other people have written testifying to your beliefs, any letters from Selective Service, and other documentation. Ask your Meeting or house of worship if it will keep a copy as well and to minute or keep documentation of its recognition of this file as part of its permanent record. If the draft were restarted, documentation is one evidence of your sincerity as a CO. Finally, it is important to know that being granted CO status is not automatic, even if you come from a historic peace church and have documentation such as the above.

SOURCES FOR HELP, MORE INFORMATION OR TO LEARN HOW TO WORK TO END SELECTIVE SERVICE REGISTRATION



National Youth and Militarism Program
American Friends Service Committee
1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
phone: 215/241-7176
e-mail: youthmil@afsc.org
web: <http://www.youth4peace.org>

Center on Conscience and War/NISBCO
1830 Connecticut Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20009
phone: 800/379-2670
web: <http://www.nisbco.org>

Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO)
630 20th Street #302
Oakland, CA 94612
phone: 510/465-1617

1515 Cherry St
Philadelphia, PA 19102
phone: 215/563-8787
web: <http://www.objector.org>

FEAT (Fund for Education and Training, for young men
who do not register for reasons of conscience):
web: <http://www.nisbco.org/FEAT.htm>

