



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

February 8, 2016

Mr. Sean Bentel
Vice President, Customer and Relations
4333 Amon Carter Blvd.
Fort Worth, TX 76155

Dear Mr. Carter:

Perhaps you are unaware that American Airlines is delivering a daily slap in the face to thousands of officers of one of this country's uniformed services: the members of the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). I understand that you may not know much about the Public Health Service, but it is one of the seven Uniformed Services of the United States, along with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

The "slap in the face" to which I am referring is denying to these active duty officers the free baggage check when they are traveling in uniform or on military orders. Many other domestic air carriers do provide such a courtesy, but United does not.

You have undoubtedly heard of the United States Surgeon General, who wears a three-star admiral's rank and uniform. What you probably do not know is that there are 6700 uniformed officers who report to the Surgeon General, and they, too, wear military rank and uniforms. They receive military pay and benefits and have U.S. veteran's status. (Please see Encl. 1). This federal law states that, "Active service of commissioned officers of the [US Public Health] Service shall be deemed to be active military service in the Armed Forces of the United States for the purposes of all laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs . . ." It could hardly be clearer than this. These officers deploy both domestically and overseas, as they did in 2014 and 2015 when hundreds of them voluntarily risked their lives by going to Liberia to fight the deadly Ebola virus. The Commissioned Corps of the USPHS—all 6700 of them—was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation by President Obama for courage and professionalism in tackling Ebola in West Africa. (Please see Encl 2.)

I point out that this courtesy would not cost American Airlines very much in terms of revenue, because there are only 6700 active duty members of the USPHS, as opposed to 490,000 members of the U.S. Army alone. The USPHS, in case you did not know it, is an all-officer corps. There are no enlisted personnel in it, which means that you would be making loyal customers out of 6700 individuals whose salary and education make them a sought-after demographic.

President Obama understands the courage and professionalism of these officers and deemed them worthy of the high honor of a seldom-awarded Presidential Unit Citation. We believe that American Airlines should also recognize these officers by giving them the same benefits as military officers. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Col. James T. Currie, USA (Ret.)
Executive Director

42 U.S. Code § 213 - Military benefits

Current through Pub. L. [113-234](#).

(d) Active service deemed active military service with respect to laws administered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Active service of commissioned officers of the [US Public Health] Service shall be deemed to be active military service in the Armed Forces of the United States for the purposes of all laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (except the Servicemen's Indemnity Act of 1951) and section [417](#) of this title.

(e) Active service deemed active military service with respect to Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

Active service of commissioned officers of the Service shall be deemed to be active military service in the Armed Forces of the United States for the purposes of all rights, privileges, immunities, and benefits now or hereafter provided under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act ([50 App. U.S.C. 501](#) et seq.).

(f) Active service deemed active military service with respect to anti-discrimination laws

Active service of commissioned officers of the Service shall be deemed to be active military service in the Armed Forces of the United States for purposes of all laws related to discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability.



The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL
UNIT CITATION to

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE COMMISSIONED CORPS

For service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

For extraordinary courage and the highest level of performance in action throughout the United States Government's response to the Ebola outbreak from Sept 9, 2014, to May 1, 2015. Upon my direction, the Commissioned Corps established and staffed the Monrovia Medical Unit to provide direct patient care, restore hope, and bolster international confidence. Commissioned Corps officers were the only United States Government asset to provide direct patient care to health care workers with Ebola in West Africa. Operations also involved highly specialized skills in epidemiology, laboratory services, and incident management. The Corps' activities helped turn the tide of the outbreak and exemplified unwavering dedication to their mission of protecting, promoting, and advancing the health and safety of the Nation. This Presidential Unit Citation awarded to all officers of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service recognizes dauntless resilience and outstanding performance in the face of danger and uncertainty. The officers' tireless commitment to this response reflects great credit upon the Commissioned Corps and upholds the highest traditions of the uniformed services of the United States.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "B. H. Clinton", written in a cursive style.