



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

July 19, 2017

American Airlines
4333 Amon Carter Boulevard
Fort Worth, TX 76155

Dear American Airlines:

I am writing to you as the representative of officers who serve in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) to request that you include them in your military free baggage program. You probably don't know anything about the USPHS, so I'll start by saying that it is an all-officer corps of 6600 professionals that has existed since 1889. Its members comprise one of the seven federal uniformed services, along with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, etc. Its members are given a commission by the President, just like officers in the armed forces. They wear Navy uniforms with PHS insignia, unless they serve the Coast Guard, in which case they wear Coast Guard uniforms.

They receive military pay and allowances, shop at military exchanges and commissaries, and receive medical care for themselves and their families through either a military treatment facility or TRICARE—just like those serving in the armed forces. They deploy domestically and overseas just as do members of the armed forces, and almost 900 of them have deployed with the U.S. military to Iraq and Afghanistan. They travel officially and often in uniform. Unless your employees check the ID card, they are apt to think that they are in the U.S. Navy. ID cards for USPHS officers are identical to those carried by members of the Army, Navy, etc., with the words "Uniformed Services" at the top, just like an Army or Navy ID, followed by the agency, which would be "Army," "Navy," or "USPHS." ID cards for officers in the USPHS are issued by the Defense Department. USPHS officers are veterans under federal law and are entitled to be buried in VA cemeteries. They were recognized as veterans in the ceremony program at Arlington National Cemetery this past November 11 and recently on Memorial Day, also at Arlington National Cemetery.

One of our members was recently informed by an American Airlines employee that the airline only gave free baggage check to "people who fight for our freedom." How about the nearly-900 PHS officers who deployed with U.S. armed forces to Iraq and Afghanistan? Are they not deserving of the free baggage check? How about the thousands of PHS officers who deployed when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit our Gulf Coast? Are they not deserving of the free baggage check? How about the hundreds of PHS officers who deployed to West Africa to fight the deadly Ebola virus? Are they not deserving of this recognition?

If American Airlines is going to distinguish between those "who fight for our freedom" and those who don't, then you are making a very peculiar choice when you leave out the officers of the U.S. Public Health Service. They put their lives on the line just like members of the armed forces do. The only difference is that they do not carry weapons—and neither do medical personnel in the Army, Navy, and Air Force. That's a requirement under the Geneva Convention. I suggest to you that American Airlines is making a distinction without a difference here, and we urge you to review and change your policy.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions relating to this request.

Sincerely,

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