



# 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. Bentel:

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 American 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