



Center on Conscience & War

Board of Directors

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Documenting Conscientious Objection

To qualify as a conscientious objector under US law, one must be opposed to “participation in war in any form” because of ethical, moral or religious beliefs. The legal standard requires that one must sincerely hold those beliefs. But how can you prove what you believe?

If an active draft were to resume, one would be given very little time, possibly 10 days or less, to file and document a claim. And the draft board would likely be thinking, “How do we know you aren’t making this up now that we’re drafting you?”

So conscientious objectors, and their communities of support, should be doing things **now** that can help someone establish their objection to war. Keeping a record somewhere of actions that are consistent with objecting to war can be very helpful. Whether it’s early school projects that indicate an aversion to violence, organizing against bullying at their school, or participation in peace marches or similar activities, maintaining a file, or box with evidence of these activities can be good documentation. Even if the person is too young to be making the choice about joining a peace activity themselves, documentation can be useful to show the kind of values they were exposed to at a young age.

When they are old enough to be able to clearly articulate their inner feelings, they should write or dictate a statement of what they believe, and how that relates to participation in war (or violence.) They could do this at several points in their life, which might show the evolution or maturing of their beliefs. It would be wise for them to do things that they could point to as evidence of their beliefs. (Letters to Congress, to the newspaper, join peace groups, peace demonstrations, standing with refugees, volunteering at a soup kitchen, etc.)

At some point before their 18th birthday, they should write an essay that addresses these 3 questions:

- (1) What do you believe (about participating in war)?
- (2) How did these beliefs develop? (What experiences, people, or other factors helped to shape those beliefs?)
- (3) How does your life reflect these beliefs? (Or how do these beliefs influence choices you make?)

It is never too late to write such a statement!!! Even if the person is older now, we encourage writing a CO statement.

If they are active in a church or religious group, they should put their statement on file with their church or faith community. They should also ask the governing body to schedule a conversation with them about their conscientious objector beliefs at a business meeting. The conversation in that context could be helpful to the conscientious objector, equally important, the fact that it was discussed becomes part of the official minutes. The clerk or some other official could write a letter verifying the conversation should it become necessary.

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“Stopping war one soldier at a time”

If they are not part of a religious community, they could file their statement with the Center on Conscience & War or some similar group.

If the person is required to register for the draft, they need to decide whether they will register. Some conscientious objectors feel that registering for the draft is itself a form of participating in war. As Edward Hasbrouck of Draft Resistance News has observed, “the availability of the draft helps enable the U.S. to threaten to crush any opposition to U.S. hegemony with rapid and overwhelming military escalation. And the perceived ability to rely on those threats makes it easier not to consider diplomatic or other alternatives to force as a response to conflicts.”

Failure to register (if required) is a violation of federal law, and potentially carries serious penalties.

If the conscientious objector is registering, they should register on a paper form rather than online. They should write “I am a conscientious objector” or words to that effect on the registration form above their signature. (That’s not possible online.) Registration forms *should be* available at US Post Offices, and a printable registration form is available on the Selective Service website ([Form-1-Resized.pdf](https://www.sss.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Form_1_2-6-25.13.pdf)).
https://www.sss.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Form_1_2-6-25.13.pdf

Once they are registered, Selective Service will send them a Registration Acknowledgement. The instructions say to make sure the information is correct, and if not send back the enclosed Change of Information form. Since it will not acknowledge that the person registered as a conscientious objector, they should send back the form indicating that Selective Service made a mistake by not including that the person registered as a conscientious objector. (One who was registered without writing on a paper form could send in the change of information form at any time indicating their conscientious objection.) Keep any correspondence from Selective Service about this. It’s further evidence.

Most importantly, these are things a conscientious objector can do to help document their beliefs. **This is not the same as applying for conscientious objector status.**

Under current regulations, that would be done if/when the draft resumes. If your number comes up to be drafted, Selective Service would give you a very short window of time in which you can formally apply.

If you have questions or get stuck writing your statement, reach out to the Center on Conscience & War for help.