



*Whatcom Peace  
& Justice Center  
www.WhatcomPJC.org*

# **If there is a Draft, will you go?**

## **Conscientious Objection Information Sheet**

### **Are you a Conscientious Objector (CO)?**

You are a Conscientious Objector if you have religious, ethical, or moral beliefs that lead you to oppose participation in war of any form. If you claim CO status you may be discharged from military service. If drafted, you may be assigned to alternative service as a civilian. COs must be opposed to **all** wars—that is, to war in general. For example, you cannot claim CO status if you are opposed to the Iraq War because of your political beliefs, but would have fought in Afghanistan. That is called “selective conscientious objection” and it is not recognized by the US government as a category for exemption from military service.

COs exist around the world. COs were at times imprisoned for their beliefs or worse. The military often denies people CO status and forces them to enlist. In world history, there are extreme cases of people being killed for refusing to fight in a war. For example, in Germany during WWII, Franz Jaegerstetter refused to serve in the Third Reich. A husband and father of three children, he was beheaded for following his conscience in saying no to Hitler’s regime and an unjust war. This is an extreme example. Today, deciding to be a CO has fewer risks; however, it remains a serious decision and course of action to consider deeply.

There are two types of COs:

- 1) Someone who is opposed to any and all forms of military service.
- 2) Someone whose beliefs allow him to serve in the military, but solely in a non-combatant and unarmed capacity.

If CO status is granted by the draft board, alternative service will depend on the type of CO you are:

- 1) If opposed to any military service, you may be deemed exempt from military service and be allowed to remain in the civilian world; or you may be ordered to perform alternative service as a civilian for two years, doing work that is positive for the community such as working with the very young or old, education, or healthcare.
- 2) If a non-combatant CO, you may be reassigned to non-combatant duties, such as a medic or clerk, where you are not trained in how to use a weapon.

### **How the Draft Works**

The US Congress would have to vote to give the President the power to begin inductions or “mandatory conscription.” Men who are 20 years old will be drafted by a lottery system based on birthday. Those who receive the “mailgram” must report to boot camp within two weeks. If you are going to claim CO Status, you must do so within that two-week period, or your request will be denied. Two weeks isn’t a long time to gather all the information you need to prove your case; so it is important and VITAL to start way ahead of a draft.

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### **Consequences of Claiming CO Status: Some Things to Consider**

- 1) Some CO's refuse to register with Selective Service, which is a federal crime punishable by up to 5 years in prison and/or a fine up to \$250,000, and you can be denied federal student loans.
- 2) Your family or friends may not support your decision, especially friends who are being drafted and may feel like you are "a sissy" or that you are unfairly abandoning them.

### **How to Compile a Conscientious Objector (CO) Claim**

**From the Central Committee on Conscientious Objection – [www.objector.org](http://www.objector.org)**

1) If you register with Selective Service, write that you are a CO on the card before sending it in. Photocopy the card and send it to yourself and leave it sealed.

2) Write a statement of beliefs that explain why, how, when, where, etc. you became a CO. List anything that could have influenced your beliefs against war and killing, such as religion, films, books, upbringing, events you attended, etc.

3) Find 3 people who know you very well who can write a letter on your behalf supporting your beliefs as a CO, such as a teacher or pastor.

4) Write a letter to Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors explaining that you are a CO, keep a copy for yourself, with the receipt of it being mailed. (Send to: 405 14th St. #205, Oakland, CA 94612.

We don't archive these letters but we will send you a letter confirming we have received your letter. Keep that letter from us as part of your CO file. You can send your CO file to the Center on Conscience and War to be archived. (Send to: Center on Conscience & War 1830 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009.

5) Make two copies and compile all of these documents and get them notarized.

6) Put them in two different safe places and if you get drafted you can present this claim to your local draft board and your chances of getting a CO exemption will be much stronger.

You need to build a paper trail and document everything possible that could help define you as a person who could not go to war. If you go to any anti-war events, document them somehow as proof that you went, keep the flyers, have your photo taken at the event, etc. They basically want to see that you are genuinely opposed to war, and not just somebody who doesn't want to fight. You must be opposed to all wars; this doesn't mean you can't use violence in personal self-defense.

**For local assistance with Draft Counseling and CO support contact:  
Whatcom Peace & Justice Center – (360) 734-0217**

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