

To the Board of the Socorro School District

We, the undersigned, are writing to you about the issue of military recruiters in our schools.

Two points are of concern.

1. Personal information about students given by schools to the military

The federal government has determined that the personal information of each student in any high school will be given to military recruiters unless the student declares that he or she does not want the military to get that information. This is called the *opt-out* provision. Each school must allow students to opt-out, and this must be done at the beginning of each school year.

Last year the opt-out provision was offered to students at Socorro High by a single line on one page of the materials that were given out at the beginning of the school year. That line let the student choose that he or she did not want the military or colleges to have their personal information.

We request that this be corrected so that students have a clear option of opting out of giving their personal information to only the military. We attach a sample handout that will provide for this. If the packet of materials for students has already been prepared, this can be given out in class, so long as the school does not release information prior to that.

2. Military recruiters in classrooms

a. Military recruiters visit classrooms at the high school. They are not just offering a career option, they are promoting a controversial viewpoint. Once a school allows a controversial viewpoint to be promoted, it must allow equal access for the opposing viewpoint. Both these points have been established in court cases around the country (Chicago; West Palm Beach, Florida; San Diego; Atlanta; Erie, Pennsylvania). Military recruiters present a number of highly controversial issues as fact: the military is necessary for the preservation of our freedoms; the military makes our country strong; the military offers good job training and good pay; the military offers good benefits to veterans.

The school district, then, is obligated to present the opposing viewpoint whenever military recruiters are allowed into a classroom. In the past some of us through the Socorro Peace Vigil have been given the opportunity to give that viewpoint. This last school year, however, was different.

b. Last school year Mr. Bala Settu invited the military to speak to his freshman careers classes, which included all freshmen. To give an idea how military recruiters mislead, in each class the recruiters asked the students to give them their personal contact information. It was only after a student in one class said she would not do so that they said that this was not required. They were willing to use their authority to intimidate students to get information, not indicating that this was optional.

In April Dr. Epstein, representing the Peace Vigil, went to Mr. Settu and asked that he and Joseph Callan be allowed to present the opposing viewpoint in his classes. Mr. Callan is a retired Marine Corps staff sergeant who served three tours in Iraq and is now President of the Albuquerque chapter of the Iraq Veterans Against the War. Mr. Settu initially agreed, but later said that they couldn't speak to students in his classes because he had seen the Peace Vigil literature which he termed anti-American. We attach here that literature:

<i>The Military's Not Just Another Job</i>	<i>Sgt. Abe, the Honest Recruiter</i> (also in Spanish)
<i>For Girls Who Are Thinking of Joining the Military</i>	<i>Military Benefits?</i>
<i>Addicted to War</i> (a book, also in Spanish)	

c. Dr. Epstein discussed this with the Superintendent, Dr. Wilson. He showed her the materials. She said she hoped they were better because the material the Peace Vigil used previously was provocative. The previous handouts differed only in that we used a brochure about women in the military, which we also attach. That and all of the literature we provide contains references that indicate where the stated facts are documented.

d. That our views seem anti-American to Mr. Settu and provocative to Dr. Wilson is a good example of the controversial nature of the issue of the military in our society, for our literature is entirely factual. Dr. Wilson and Mr. Settu are not used to seeing those facts, nor are those facts, which contradict the military's view, presented to our students.

e. Dr. Epstein asked Dr. Wilson to allow him and Mr. Joseph Callan to make a presentation on behalf of the Socorro Peace Vigil to those classes. Dr. Wilson said that she could not force Mr. Settu to allow us into his classes, but she assured us that the opposing view would be presented. She later contacted Dr. Epstein and said she had found on the web two documents “Drafted at 19, Opposing Military Recruiters at 61” and “Should Military Recruiters Be Allowed in High Schools” which she said she would ask Mr. Ballu to discuss in his class. Those documents are attached here.

They do not address except tangentially the issue of the role of the military in our society nor whether the military is a good job option. They are about whether the military should be allowed to make presentations in schools. The first is a human interest story. They do not clearly present a view opposing the military’s views supported by detailed facts.

In any case, Mr. Settu is not suitable to present the opposing view because he is clearly biased and not conversant with views of peace activists and the facts on which those are based. He is neither an authority nor an authority figure comparable to the military recruiters. In the end, however, it made no difference what Dr. Wilson suggested: Mr. Settu presented nothing.

We want the school board to clarify its policy on military recruiters in the classroom.

We would like to suggest two options.

A. Do not let the military nor any other recruiters make presentations in the classrooms.

This is the policy of the Magdalena School District, as told to Dr. Epstein by their Superintendent, Mr. Mike Chambers, who said that class time is too limited and valuable to allow presentations to take away from instruction.

B. Allow the Socorro Peace Vigil or some other group that is equally knowledgeable about the issues of the military and peace to make presentations in any class in which a military recruiter makes a presentation.

The first option does not keep the military from recruiting students. They will have the personal information of students who want to hear from them (and if no action is taken on the first point of this letter, from students who don’t want to hear from them, too). The high school can also include the military in job fairs, so long as peace activists are allowed to give out information about careers in peace work, too.

We know that you are concerned about our children’s education. We hope that you will resolve this issue in a clear way that takes into account the controversial nature of the presentations given by military recruiters and the right and need of students to hear opposing viewpoints so that they may be better informed before making a decision of such importance to their future.

Name

Address

STUDENT OPT-OUT FORM

regarding the

Release of Information Concerning the Student

Federal public law 107-110, section 9528 of the ESEA, “No Child Left Behind Act”, requires school districts to release student names, addresses, and phone numbers to military recruiters upon the request of the recruiters. Students are then called at home by recruiters. The law also requires the school district to notify you of your right to Opt-Out from this by requesting that the district not release your information to military recruiters. The completion and return of this form serves as your request to withhold your private information.

School _____ Date _____

Student Name _____

Date of Birth _____

I request that this student’s name, address, telephone number, and any other information concerning the student not be released to Armed Forces and Military Recruiters, or Military Schools.

Signature of student _____

or

Signature of parent _____