SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

JAN 27 2022

The Honorable Brad Little
Governor of Idaho
Boise, Idaho 83720

Dear Governor Little:

Thank you for your letter dated December 16, 2021 concerning Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccination requirements for the members of the Army National Guard and Air National Guard.

In making the decision to require vaccination against COVID-19 for Service members, I considered the thousands of hospitalizations and the hundreds of deaths among Service members, civilians, and their families related to COVID-19. COVID-19 takes our Service members out of the fight, temporarily or permanently, and jeopardizes our ability to meet mission requirements. To ensure that we maintain a healthy and ready military force capable of accomplishing our mission to defend this Nation and to protect the American people, vaccination against COVID-19 is an essential military readiness requirement for all components and units of the military, including the Idaho National Guard.

This decision stems directly from my responsibility and authority as the Secretary of Defense to promote the health, safety, and readiness of our military personnel, regardless of duty status, to include all members of the National Guard performing any duty or training under title 10 or title 32, U.S. Code. The concerns raised in your letter do not negate the need for this important military readiness requirement.

In accordance with the Presidential authority in title 32, U.S. Code, section 110, to prescribe regulations and issue orders necessary to organize, discipline, and govern the non-Federalized National Guard, all members of the Idaho Army and Air National Guard, regardless of duty status, must follow the directions of the Secretaries of the Army and the Air Force, respectively, regarding specific COVID-19 vaccine compliance deadlines and requirements. Failure by a member to do so will lead to a prohibition on participation in drills, training, and other duty conducted under title 32 and will jeopardize the member's status in the National Guard.

Thank you for your support and leadership as we embark on this critical effort together. I assure you that I share your pride in the patriotism and dedication of all the men and women serving in the National Guard.

Sincerely,

Lloyd J. Austin