



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

MAY - 9 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Certification of Merit-Based Military Service Academy Admissions

The Military Service Academies (MSA) are elite warfighting institutions with long histories of producing world class military officers. The Department owes it to our Nation, our Service members, and the young Americans applying to the MSAs to ensure admissions to these prestigious institutions are based exclusively on merit. This ensures only the most qualified candidates are admitted, trained, and ultimately commissioned to lead the finest fighting force in history. Selecting anyone but the best erodes lethality, our warfighting readiness, and undercuts the culture of excellence in our Armed Forces.

In alignment with my January 29, 2025 memorandum, "Restoring America's Fighting Force," I direct the Secretaries of the Military Departments to certify within 30 days that, for purposes of the 2026 MSA admissions cycle, as well as all subsequent admissions cycles, the MSA admissions offices will:

- 1) Apply no consideration of race, ethnicity, or sex; and
- 2) Offer admission based exclusively on merit.

Merit-based scores may give weight to unique athletic talent or other experiences such as prior military service or performance at a MSA preparatory school.

Going forward, MSAs shall rank-order candidates by merit-based scores within each nomination category as described in 10 U.S.C. §§ 7442, 7443, 8454, 8456, 9442, and 9443. It is the Department's expectation that the highest-ranking candidates within each nomination category should receive appointments.

I direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to certify the MSAs are compliant with merit-based admissions processes upon the completion of the 2026 admissions cycle.

The Department must remain steadfast in its pursuit of excellence and never compromise the high standards at our MSAs. A strong officer corps is essential to ensuring the United States military remains the most lethal the world has ever known.



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