WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A COMMAND SUPPORT LETTER (CSL)?
An Exempt Determination or an IRB Approval does not obligate a commander to support any research. Likewise, command support should not be construed as a simple “check-the-block” on the required document list. Obtaining command support is a process where the investigator communicates with the commander to discuss the details of the research including the purpose, required resources, anticipated risks and benefits, etc. The commander should have an opportunity to express concerns and ask questions before making a decision about whether to support the research. Some commanders may elect to delegate a department representative to complete the fact-gathering portion of this responsibility, but the commander must ultimately be the signatory on the CSL.

WHAT RESEARCH REQUIRES A COMMAND SUPPORT LETTER?
Command Support is needed for all research that proposes to recruit USMA personnel as research participants. The CSL will affirm the specific parameters of access that an investigator can expect to support the research. For example, the CSL must include the amount and level of resources (equipment and space), access to subjects, and any other conditions for executing the project.

WHO SHOULD SIGN THE COMMAND SUPPORT LETTER?
The CSL is signed by the lowest level of command authority, such as a department head. If more than one department is engaged or supports the project, the major activity director (MAD) will be the signatory. If more than one MAD is engaged or supports the project, the USMA Chief of Staff or the Superintendent will sign the CSL. Research conducted by external investigators must have a CSL from the USMA Chief of Staff or the Superintendent.

The investigator must consider all resources that are required for the research when seeking command support. For example, a study that enrolls Sandhurst cadets, collects data using the Engagement Skills Trainer, and executes the study during Sandhurst time, would require a CSL from the Department of Military Instruction. A study that enrolls corps squad athletes, collects performance data, and executes during designated corps squad practice time, would require a CSL from the Athletic Director. A study that enrolls first-year cadets enrolled in math courses, collects information during focus groups and merges that with admissions data, and executes during Comm’s Hour, would require a CSL from the USMA Chief of Staff or the Superintendent.

HOW DO I USE THIS FORM?
To use this template, fill in the sections in red print, and be sure to change all print to black. If you have questions about letterhead, signature blocks, or other administrative issues, contact the commander’s administrative assistant. When your letter is complete, contact the Human Protections Director (HPD) at HRPP@westpoint.edu. The HPD will check the CSL for content and arrange for SJA review. The HPD will return the CSL and legal review to the Principal Investigator for signature routing. The CSL should be routed to the commander only after the CSL is complete and ready for signature. The signatory can provide either a wet or electronic signature.