

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 23, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin, III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

On October 25, 2023, a senseless act of violence killed 18 civilians and wounded 13 others in Lewiston, Maine. The shooter was Sergeant First Class Robert R. Card, II. The tragedy destroyed families and sent ripple effects across not only the Lewiston community and the state of Maine, but across the entire nation as well. At this critical juncture, we must ensure that we take appropriate action in the wake of such tragedies in the hope that we can prevent them in the future.

The U.S. Army Reserve Command's AR 15-6 investigation and the U.S. Army Inspector General's subsequent review identified multiple recommendations that—if followed—will benefit the Department of Defense as it provides care for service members. While we continue to press for change, we feel a sense of frustration because, truthfully, recommendations are nothing without action.

Therefore, we are deeply interested in how your office intends to implement these recommendations, as well as the timeline for implementation. This is life and death and, as we have seen over the past few years, delays can be costly. For instance, the AR 15-6 memorandum explains that the U.S. Army Reserve “averaged 44 suicides over the past four calendar years, which necessitates a better response to mental health.” Moreover, the Defense Health Agency has a responsibility to determine if Four Winds, where SFC Card had been a patient, failed to provide adequate treatment and, if so, to take appropriate action.

Additional recommendations include directed mandatory refresher training on HIPAA. While the review recommends this specifically for Command Teams and Legal Teams of the 108th Training Command, perhaps this (and similar recommendations) should be incorporated across the entire force. Understanding the applicable legal framework is critical to effective decision-making, and we must equip our leaders, at all levels, with the tools to act effectively and decisively.

Multiple recommended policy changes for the U.S. Army Reserve Command are included in the reports as well. Such recommendations include updates to the Psychological Health Program Standard Operating Procedures and initiation procedures for Line of Duty Evaluations, as well as assessments of the Army Reserve Warrior Transition Support Program and the impact of establishing an Army Reserve Behavioral Health Liaison, among others. Additionally, the Inspector General's report recommends expanding the Army Suicide Prevention Program to encompass broader behavioral health emergencies, as well as policy provisions to better facilitate Reserve commanders' coordination with military treatment facilities.

We support these recommendations, among others, as all are critical in taking steps to provide effective care and prevent future violence. These reviews make clear that more could have been done in the case of SFC Card.

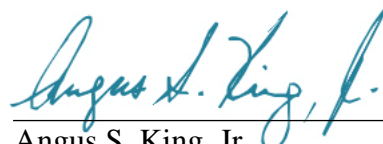
While we cannot undo this tragedy, we can do our best to learn from past errors. We urge you to implement the recommendations from the AR 15-6 and Inspector General reviews immediately, and your office should carefully assess which recommendations should be implemented across the entire force.

We look forward to hearing from you, and we request regular briefings on the actions the Department is taking.

Sincerely,



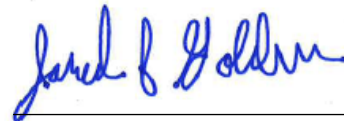
Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr
United States Senator



Chellie M. Pingree
Member of Congress



Jared F. Golden
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Christine Wormuth, Secretary of the Army