

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2023

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We write to respectfully request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct an evaluation of the Department of Defense's (DOD), military services', and Department of Education's (ED) efforts to ensure the integrity of each service's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs and protect JROTC cadets from exploitative practices and predatory instructors engaged in sexual abuse, harassment, and other misconduct.

In July 2022, the *New York Times* reported that within the previous five years, JROTC instructors have been criminally charged for sexual misconduct involving students at rates "far higher than the rate of civilian high school teachers." According to the *Times*, during those five years, prosecutors had brought criminal charges against at least 33 JROTC instructors. Some of these instructors "had already been flagged for previous allegations of misconduct but were allowed to stay on the job," while many other instructors "have been accused of misconduct but never charged."¹

In August 2022, the Committee on Oversight and Reform's Subcommittee on National Security launched an investigation into the troubling allegations raised by the *Times*' reporting.² Information obtained by the Subcommittee strongly suggests that the incidence of sexual abuse and harassment committed by JROTC instructors is significantly more widespread than previously reported. According to information released by the Subcommittee, 60 allegations of sexual abuse, harassment, or other sexual misconduct have been made against JROTC instructors and reported to DOD and the military services during the past five years, 58 of which were substantiated following a law enforcement or school investigation.³

¹ *'I Felt Trapped': Sexual Abuse of Teens in the Military's J.R.O.T.C. Program*, New York Times (July 9, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/2022/07/09/us/sexual-abuse-jrotc.html).

² Letter from Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, and Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security, to Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, et al. (Aug. 15, 2022) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2022-08-15.CBM%20SFL%20to%20Austin-DOD%20et%20al.%20re%20JROTC%20Programs.pdf>).

³ Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, Supplemental Memorandum for *Hearing on JROTC: Protecting Cadets from Sexual Abuse and Instructor Misconduct*, 117th Cong. (Nov. 16, 2022) (online at

In September 2022, Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee launched an investigation into DOD and ED oversight of the JROTC program.⁴ DOD reported there had been 114 allegations of violence, including sexual abuse or harassment in the JROTC program over the past decade.⁵ The Navy did not have any “specific policy to address adult sexual misconduct” in the program.⁶ ED, which also has jurisdiction over sexual abuse of high school students in the JROTC program, only received three complaints.⁷ There was also no process in place for ED to receive reports of sexual misconduct.⁸ DOD officials have conceded “there’s very little oversight” of these programs overall and there isn’t any survey or public reporting of incidents of sexual assault.⁹

On November 16, 2022, the Subcommittee held a hearing to receive testimony about the steps DOD and the military services are taking to ensure the safety and well-being of JROTC students. While witnesses generally agreed that greater oversight and accountability of JROTC are necessary, Members on both sides of the aisle expressed concern that not enough is being done to prevent predatory instructors from misusing their positions of authority to prey upon vulnerable cadets.¹⁰

The overwhelming majority of JROTC instructors are honorable and trustworthy; they have served their nation with distinction—and continue to do so by teaching and mentoring our nation’s next generation of military officers. However, any incident of sexual abuse or

<https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2022.11.16%20SUPPLEMENTAL%20MEMO%20for%20the%20NS%20Subc%20Hearing%20on%20JROTC.pdf>

⁴ Letters from Senators Elizabeth Warren, Kirsten Gillibrand, Richard Blumenthal, and Mazie Hirono to Gilbert R. Cisneros, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona (Sept. 21, 2022), (online at www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Letters%20to%20DOD%20and%20ED%20re%20JROTC%20Program.pdf)

⁵ Letter from Gilbert R. Cisneros, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to Senators Elizabeth Warren, Kirsten Gillibrand, Richard Blumenthal, and Mazie Hirono (Jan. 18, 2023) (on file with the office of Senator Elizabeth Warren).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Letter from Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, to Senator Elizabeth Warren (Nov. 3, 2022) (on file with the office of Senator Elizabeth Warren).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren, *Press Release: ICYMI: At Hearing, DoD Officials Acknowledge to Senator Warren There is Lack of Adequate Oversight to Prevent Sexual Misconduct in Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps*, (Sept. 23, 2022) (online at www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/icymi-at-hearing-dod-officials-acknowledge-to-senator-warren-there-is-lack-of-adequate-oversight-to-prevent-sexual-misconduct-in-junior-reserve-officers-training-corps); Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren, *Press Release: ICYMI: At First Hearing of Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee, Warren Highlights Priorities for 2024 NDAA*, (Mar. 16, 2023) (online at www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/icymi-at-first-hearing-of-armed-services-personnel-subcommittee-warren-highlights-priorities-for-2024-ndaa).

¹⁰ *Hearing on JROTC: Protecting Cadets from Sexual Abuse and Instructor Misconduct*, Subcommittee on National Security, Committee on Oversight and Reform, 117th Cong. (Nov. 16, 2022) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/legislation/hearings/jrotc-protecting-cadets-from-sexual-abuse-and-instructor-misconduct>).

harassment is one too many and betrays the faith and trust that JROTC cadets and their families have placed in the U.S. military.

Moreover, the information obtained by the *Times*, the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee raises serious concerns that DOD, the military services, and ED are not carrying out adequate oversight of their respective JROTC programs. Subsequent reporting by the *Times* revealed that dozens of high schools are allegedly compelling students to enroll in JROTC classes despite DOD regulations that require JROTC participation to be voluntary.¹¹ According to another report, some educational materials used in JROTC classrooms reportedly provide students with distorted or inaccurate representations that include “outdated gender messages, a conservative shading of political issues and accounts of historical events that falsify or downplay the failings of the U.S. government.”¹²

It is incumbent upon us as Members of Congress to conduct oversight and, as appropriate, consider whether additional legislation may be needed to protect JROTC cadets from sexual abuse and harassment while ensuring that DOD and the military services conduct adequate oversight and maintain the integrity of JROTC.

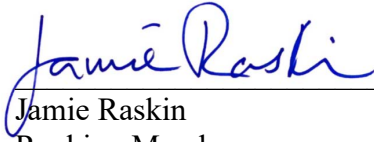
To assist us with our work, we request that GAO conduct an evaluation to review the extent to which DOD, the military services, and ED (1) collect and maintain data on incidents of sexual or other misconduct involving JROTC instructors; (2) have established policies to vet and periodically review the qualifications, credentials, and suitability of JROTC instructors; (3) have established policies to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual misconduct within JROTC; and (4) established mechanisms or processes to ensure appropriate oversight of the military services’ respective JROTC programs. To the extent GAO identifies additional issues pertaining to DOD’s efforts to eliminate evidence of instances of sexual abuse and misconduct within JROTC, please include these matters within the scope of your review.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability staff at (202) 225-5051; and Michael Tucker in Rep. Sylvia Garcia’s office at Michael.Tucker1@mail.house.gov or (202) 225-1688.


¹¹ *Thousands of Teens Are Being Pushed into Military’s Junior R.O.T.C.*, New York Times (Dec. 11, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/2022/12/11/us/jrotc-schools-mandatory-automatic-enrollment.html).

¹² *J.R.O.T.C. Textbooks Offer an Alternative View of the World*, New York Times (Dec. 11, 2022) (online at www.nytimes.com/2022/12/11/us/jrotc-textbooks.html).

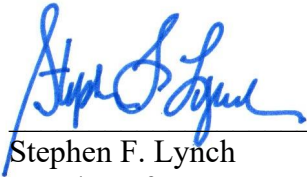
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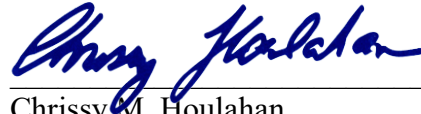
Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and
Accountability



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security
the Border, and Foreign Affairs
House Committee on Oversight and
Accountability



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Chrissy M. Houlahan
Member of Congress



Sylvia Garcia
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren
Chair
Subcommittee on Personnel
Senate Committee on Armed Services



Mazie Hirono
Senator
Subcommittee on Personnel
Senate Committee on Armed Services

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman
House Committee on Oversight and Accountability

The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs
House Committee on Oversight and Accountability

The Honorable Rick Scott, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Personnel, Senate Committee on Armed Services