

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 28, 2020

The Honorable Sean O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
Department of Defense
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Dear Acting Inspector General O'Donnell:

We write to request the Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General (IG) conduct a complete and thorough investigation into the circumstances that led to the disappearance and death of Sergeant Elder Fernandes, a 23 year-old native of Brockton, Massachusetts, who was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas.¹

According to the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and public reports, SGT Fernandes was hospitalized between August 11 and August 17, 2020. The day he was released from the hospital was the same day he was last seen by members of his unit in Killeen, Texas.² On August 25, 2020, his family reported that a body believed to be that of SGT Fernandes was found 25 miles east of Fort Hood. A backpack containing his military ID, driver's license, phone and other personal belongings was located nearby.³

Prior to SGT Fernandes' disappearance, the Army was reviewing an "investigation of abusive sexual contact involving Sgt. Fernandes."⁴ On August 26, CID announced that it had recently briefed SGT Fernandes on the outcome of that investigation and that his allegations of sexual misconduct were "unsubstantiated."⁵ According to the family's attorney, SGT Fernandes

¹ Boston Globe, "Brockton soldier missing from Fort Hood found dead, family says," Tonya Alanez, August 25, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/08/25/metro/mother-missing-fort-hood-soldier-i-just-cant-go-back-boston-without-my-son/>.

² Washington Post, "Missing Fort Hood soldier found dead, lawyer says, in growing toll of deaths there," Alex Horton, August 26, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/08/26/elder-fernandes-missing-soldier-fort-hood/>; U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, "Public's help wanted: Missing Fort Hood Soldier," press release, August 21, 2020, <https://www.cid.army.mil/assets/docs/press-releases/FernandesMissing.pdf>.

³ Washington Post, "Missing Fort Hood soldier found dead, lawyer says, in growing toll of deaths there," Alex Horton, August 26, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/08/26/elder-fernandes-missing-soldier-fort-hood/>.

⁴ NBC News, "Missing Fort Hood soldier a victim of 'abusive sexual contact,' Army says," Nicole Acevedo and Mosheh Gains, August 25, 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/missing-fort-hood-soldier-victim-abusive-sexual-contact-army-says-n1237781?cid=sm_npd_nn_tw_ma.

⁵ Task & Purpose, "Army Says Sexual Assault Complaint 'Unsubstantiated' from Soldier Found Dead near Fort Hood," Haley Britzky, August 27, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/08/27/army-says-sexual-assault-complaint-unsubstantiated-soldier-found-dead-near-fort-hood.html>.

was “bullied” and “hazed” for reporting abusive sexual contact.⁶ We are also disturbed by reports that while SGT Fernandes was missing, his family “chastised the Army’s investigation” and “said the Army took too long to get the public involved.”⁷

We are heartbroken by SGT Fernandes’ death. As Members of Congress representing SGT Fernandes and his family, we demand a full and transparent investigation into the circumstances of his death, including allegations of abusive sexual contact, bullying, and retaliation. We also ask you to investigate the Army’s response to SGT Fernandes’ disappearance and whether Army leaders kept the Fernandes family appropriately informed about the search for their missing relative until he was found on August 25.

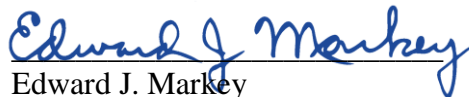
We must do more than grieve the loss of SGT Fernandes—we must seek justice and answers for his family. That starts with a full and complete investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

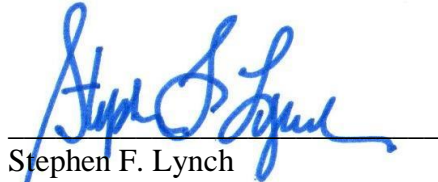
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



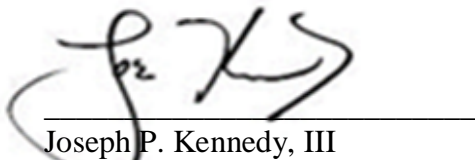
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



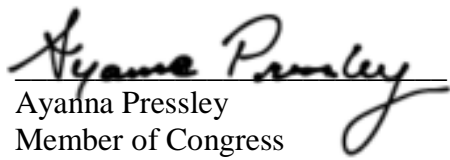
Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

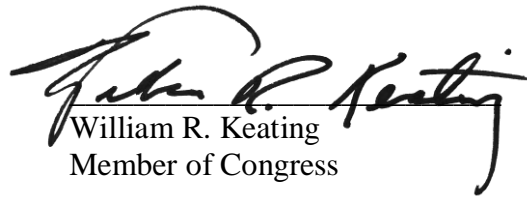


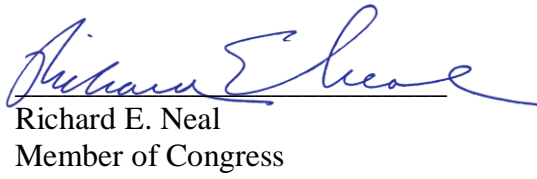
Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

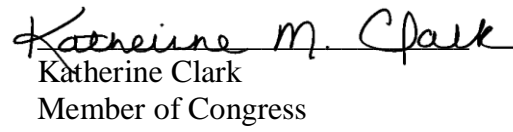
⁶ Task and Purpose, “Soldier missing from Fort Hood was 'bullied' after reporting sexual assault, lawyer says,” Haley Britzky, August 25, 2020, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-missing-elder-fernandes-sexual-assault>.

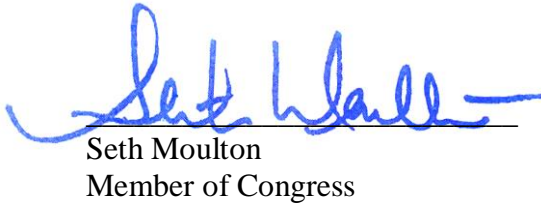
⁷ Washington Post, “Missing Fort Hood soldier found dead, lawyer says, in growing toll of deaths there,” Alex Horton, August 26, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/08/26/elder-fernandes-missing-soldier-fort-hood/>.


Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress


William R. Keating
Member of Congress


Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress


Katherine Clark
Member of Congress


Seth Moulton
Member of Congress