

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 3, 2020

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Chairman Inhofe and Ranking Member Reed:

We write to respectfully request that the Senate Armed Services Committee (the Committee) hold a public hearing with the independent review panel and Army leadership on the command climate and culture at Fort Hood, Texas.

On July 30, 2020, Secretary of the Army Ryan D. McCarthy announced the appointment of a panel consisting of five civilian experts to conduct an “independent review [...] to determine whether the command climate and culture at Fort Hood, and the surrounding military community, reflects the Army’s values, including safety, respect, inclusiveness, and a commitment to diversity, and workplaces and communities free from sexual harassment.”¹ We request this hearing in the aftermath of the deaths of 23 year-old Sergeant (SGT) Elder Fernandes² and 20 year-old Specialist (SPC) Vanessa Guillén,³ two U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Hood. They were the latest in a series of tragic deaths of soldiers from this base this year.⁴

As parents and United States Senators, we are heartbroken by the deaths of SGT Fernandes, SPC Guillén, and the other U.S. soldiers stationed at Fort Hood, and we are determined to seek justice and answers for their families and to ensure the Army is implementing necessary reforms at Fort Hood, and that Congress is holding the Army accountable. Secretary McCarthy’s decision to establish an independent review panel of highly qualified experts⁵

¹ U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Army announces panel for Fort Hood independent review,” July 30, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/237678/army_announces_panel_for_fort_hood_independent_review; U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Secretary of the Army announces independent review of Fort Hood,” July 10, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/237199/secretary_of_the_army_announces_independent_review_of_fort_hood.

² Boston Globe, “Brockton soldier missing from Fort Hood found dead, family says,” Tonya Alanez, August 26, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/08/25/metro/mother-missing-fort-hood-soldier-i-just-cant-go-back-boston-without-my-son/>.

³ New York Times, “What We Know About the Death of Vanessa Guillen,” Johnny Diaz, Maria Cramer and Christina Morales, August 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/vanessa-guillen-fort-hood.html>.

⁴ CNN, “Here's what we know about eight of the soldiers who have died this year at Fort Hood,” Dakin Andone, July 25, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/25/us/fort-hood-soldier-deaths-trnd/index.html>.

⁵ U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Army announces panel for Fort Hood independent review,” July 30, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/237678/army_announces_panel_for_fort_hood_independent_review.

reflects the Army’s recognition that the status quo at Fort Hood is unacceptable. This panel is responsible for “review[ing] historical data, such as command climate surveys, Inspector General reports, criminal/military justice reports and sexual harassment and sexual assault response program statistics,” and “conduct[ing] interviews with military members and members of the Fort Hood community.”⁶ We understand that upon its completion the review will be submitted to James E. McPherson, Under Secretary of the Army, and General Joseph M. Martin, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, who will chair a team to consider recommendations and implement appropriate changes.⁷ We believe that a public hearing that allows the committee to question the panel and Army leadership is an appropriate and necessary step consistent with our oversight responsibilities.

Although we appreciate the Army’s deliberative approach, we believe that an open hearing before the Committee with the panel members, none of whom are affiliated with the Army,⁸ followed by Army leadership who can testify to the service’s plans for implementing any recommendations provided by the panel, will provide an opportunity to candidly discuss its findings and recommendations and engage in a dialogue on ways that Congress and the Army can ensure a supportive command climate at Fort Hood for all of its soldiers.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁶ U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Secretary of the Army announces independent review of Fort Hood,” July 10, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/237199/secretary_of_the_army_announces_independent_review_of_fort_hood.

⁷ U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Army announces panel for Fort Hood independent review,” July 30, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/237678/army_announces_panel_for_fort_hood_independent_review.

⁸ *Id.*