



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 30 2018

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

Thank you for your letter to the Secretary of Defense, regarding the collection and release of data on suicide among military dependents. As this matter falls under my purview, I have been asked to respond.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, section 567, required the Secretary of Defense to prescribe policy for the standardized collection, reporting, and assessment of dependent suicide data. This requirement has been met, and is now reflected in Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 6490.16, "Defense Suicide Prevention," dated November 6, 2017. The Department determined that to meet its requirements for data collection, adjustments to the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) would be necessary. These adjustments were expedited to the extent possible without risking disruption of Service member or dependent benefits; DEERS modifications were deployed in December 2016, and full operating capability was achieved in October 2017.

The process for capturing dependent suicide data via DEERS is nascent, and may take additional time to become fully adopted and routine. Unlike Service member suicides, the majority of military dependent suicides involve an investigation by civilian medical and law enforcement personnel, whose data is not under the DoD control. The DoD Suicide Prevention Office is actively investigating other avenues by which more accurate dependent death data could be obtained. DoD is committed to strengthening compliance with data collection requirements, and to that end, will develop a communications plan to ensure Service members are aware of the information that must be reported on the death of a dependent.

I hope that you find this response helpful. Thank you for your sincere interest and support of DoD's Suicide Prevention efforts, our Service members, and their families.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Wilkie

cc:

The Honorable Tim Kaine



OSD009468-18/CMD011960-18



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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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Robert L. Wilkie

cc:

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OSD009468-18/CMD011960-18

PATTY MURRAY
WASHINGTON

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR
AND PENSIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

July 12, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis:

We write to you today with concerns about rates of suicide among military dependents. We ask that the Department of Defense (DoD) release any data on military dependent suicide, and we urge you to work with Congress to take action to address these concerns.

The FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) included a provision requiring DoD to develop a standardized method of collecting, reporting, and assessing data regarding servicemember suicide. The provision also required DoD to develop a similar policy for any dependent death that is reported as a suicide. The law required that this policy go into effect no later than 180 days after December 19, 2014. While the Department made significant progress in the intervening years to address servicemember suicide, it appears there is still no reliable system across all services for collecting data on dependent suicide. For example, the 2016 Department of Defense Suicide Report (DODSER) was released on July 2, 2018. The report included no information or reference to dependent suicide.

There is a critical need to understand the scope of this problem. We know these suicides occur, but there is presently a lack of information necessary to understand, prevent, and respond to these tragedies. We understand that collecting suicide data on military dependents can be especially challenging compared to collecting similar data on servicemembers, but in absence of clear data, this problem cannot be effectively understood or treated. Consistent data collection across all services is essential to understanding suicide risk factors and to targeting solutions to address the problem. The Department uses the DODSER to implement programs and policies designed to prevent future suicides among servicemembers. DoD should do the same for the military dependent population.

The past 16 years of war have taken a toll on our military families. They have had to bear the brunt of long deployments, frequent moves, and other stressors of military life. We owe it to military families to support them through these challenges and ensure they have access to the care and services they need.

Therefore, we ask that you provide an update on the status of implementation of FY2015 NDAA, Sec. 567 (a)(1)(B). The update should include a timeline for implementation, any limitations or barriers the Department anticipates towards full implementation, and additional resources or congressional assistance the Department may require to fulfill this mandate.



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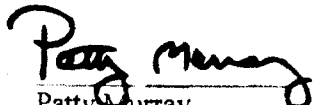
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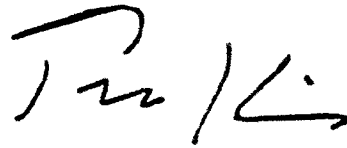
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Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you and working together on this critical issue.

Sincerely,


Patty Murray
United States Senator


Tim Kaine
United States Senator