

United States Senate

June 4, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Howard "Skip" Elliott
Acting Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Acting Inspector General Elliott:

I write to request an independent investigation into the reports of several helicopters flying in a hover at low altitudes over densely populated areas around Washington, DC on the evening of Monday, June 1, 2020. I am deeply concerned about the unnecessary risk these low-flying aircraft posed to hundreds of civilians.

In order to understand if these low-level flight operations were in violation of Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs) or United States Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs), I ask that the following questions be answered no later than June 30, 2020, accompanied with all appropriate documentation of the investigation. To the extent a question refers to the military, the question shall be interpreted to cover all of the U.S. Department of Defense's military branches and sub-agencies, including Reserve and National Guard forces.

1. What was the flight path of the rotary wing aircraft that operated in a hover at low altitude over a densely populated areas in Washington, DC on the evening of Monday, June 1, 2020?
2. Did these aircraft maintain flight operations in accordance with Baltimore-Washington helicopter route chart for the duration of their flight?
3. Did these aircraft enter prohibited airspace? If so, did they have authorization from the control tower at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport?
4. Were any additional Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) zones, in addition to the permanent DC Metropolitan Flight Restricted Zone (DC FRZ) established on Monday, June 1, 2020? If so, were any aircraft cleared to operate in the TFRs?
5. Did these aircraft operate in accordance with FAR 91.119 regarding flight over open-air assemblies of persons?

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6. Did these aircraft request an alternate clearance from air traffic control to comply with FAR 91.119?
7. Were these helicopters exempt from FAR 91.119? If so, does that alleviate them from operating at an altitude, if a power unit fails, where they can still conduct an emergency landing without undue hazard to person or property on the surface?
8. Did the operators of any of these aircraft violate any Federal laws, regulations, or policies?

An independent investigation is critical to inform the public and the Congress about whether these high-risk rotorcraft maneuvers were conducted in accordance with all applicable laws and to determine if U.S. citizens were exposed to undue hazard. Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Duckworth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator