

United States Senate

July 6, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

I write to request that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a detailed review of the United States Department of the Army's (Army) administration of its Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program. The SHARP program's mission is clear: "Enhance Army readiness through the prevention of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and associated retaliatory behaviors while providing comprehensive response capabilities."

SHARP is an integrated program that extends from the Secretary of the Army down to the individual Soldier to promote the development of a disciplined organizational culture where Soldiers intervene to prevent sexual harassment and assault; are alert to serial offender tactics; and trained on how to seek help. Under the SHARP program, Army commanders retain ultimate responsibility for command climate and culture; safety; prevention and response efforts; accountability; assessment; and safe reporting. If successful, the SHARP program should reduce the stigma of reporting; protect victims; increase prevention, investigation, prosecution and victim care capabilities; increase training and resources; and refine and sustain 24/7 response capacity throughout the Army.

Unfortunately, recent high-profile incidents raise troubling questions about whether SHARP is achieving its objectives, let alone preventing sexual harassment and assault. The Associated Press' investigative reporting disclosed that a SHARP program victims advocate with the 416th Theater Engineer Command (TEC) in Illinois alleged that the 416th TEC's SHARP program efforts violated Federal law, regulation and policy in handling third party reported incidents of sexual assault, among other serious allegations. In Texas, the family of the late Private First Class (PFC) Vanessa Guillen alleges that PFC Guillen was a victim of sexual harassment prior to her brutal murder, but never reported the sexual harassment because PFC Guillen had no confidence in the SHARP program at Fort Hood.

As required by Public Law 111-383, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) publishes a comprehensive annual report on sexual assaults involving members of the U.S. Armed Forces. However, to best inform congressional oversight of the Army's SHARP program activities, the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, and individual Members of Congress, would

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benefit from GAO – a congressional support agency that is independent of DoD – conducting a comprehensive review into the SHARP program’s effectiveness that includes surveys of Soldiers addressing individual experiences with, and perceptions of, the SHARP program. Such information would help Congress determine what aspects of the SHARP program are working well, while identifying program challenges, deficiencies and failures that require corrective action, whether through legislation or greater congressional oversight. Specifically, I request that GAO:

1. Design and administer a survey to provide to a representative sample of Soldiers to obtain views on the SHARP program’s effectiveness and shortcomings as evaluated against the Army’s own stated objectives for the program;
2. Collect and anonymize survey responses from Soldiers that have interacted with the SHARP program to determine whether individual experiences with the program and personnel comply with Federal statutory and regulatory requirements, and ascertain the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with specific SHARP program efforts; and
3. Provide recommendations to the Army and Congress that address urgent and long-term issues hindering the SHARP program’s effectiveness.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. I strongly urge GAO to accept this engagement and look forward to conferring with your team of experts and analysts on designing and implementing my requested review.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator