

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 17, 2022

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Del Toro:

We write to express our deep concern at recent press reports describing the unacceptable living conditions at two barracks buildings at Naval Support Activity Bethesda, home of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

A February 4, 2022 report from the Navy Times described junior enlisted sailors and soldiers living without air conditioning or hot water and rooms without working refrigerators, thermostats, or door locks. The report also described mishandling of ‘trouble tickets’ submitted by service members to request repairs. These conditions have serious impacts on health, morale, personal safety, and military readiness.

We appreciate your engagement with soldiers and sailors in a town hall focused on addressing these issues, and your assurance that no service member will face repercussions for speaking out about their living conditions. We also appreciate your actions over the past week to begin responding to these issues, including moving more than 350 service members out of the barracks, repairing or replacing components to restore hot water in both buildings, and establishing a website to provide updates on the progress of repairs.

However, we are alarmed by the revelation that these conditions have persisted for years despite reportedly being known to installation leadership. We appreciate fully that military installations must often operate under budgetary constraints and with competing priorities, but these conditions are critical for the wellbeing of service members and pose an immediate threat to military readiness.

Further, Comfort Hall and Sanctuary Hall are not the only facilities at NSA-Bethesda which have been allowed to deteriorate to an unacceptable state. The living and working conditions at the installation’s fire house were utterly unacceptable—plagued by mold, asbestos, roof leaks, electrical issues, and structural instability—even before a 2019 fire rendered approximately half of the facility uninhabitable. To date, despite Congressional staff visits, Congressional requests that this facility be prioritized for replacement, and report language accompanying the FY 2020 Military Construction-VA appropriations bill directing the Navy to prioritize fire and emergency services facilities, a permanent solution has still not been identified and the Navy has not prioritized the construction of a new fire station in its budget submissions to Congress.

No later than February 24, 2022, please provide a written response describing the following:

1. What actions the Navy is taking to ensure that these buildings have functioning air conditioning and hot water at all times;
2. What actions the Navy is taking to ensure that improperly handled trouble tickets are addressed, including past reports of broken refrigerators, thermostats, and door locks;
3. What actions the Navy is taking to ensure that trouble tickets are properly handled in the future;
4. What actions Maryland's Congressional delegation can take to support the Navy's efforts to improve the conditions of the barracks, including any regulatory or legislative barriers to resolving these issues and any unaddressed funding needs; and
5. What actions Naval District Washington and Naval Support Activity-Bethesda will take moving forward to end the troubling pattern of on-base facilities being neglected until they reach a state of crisis, including progress on the planned construction of a new fire house.

We owe it to the men and women entrusted to the care of this installation that NSA-Bethesda and Walter Reed are home to world-class facilities and management. We appreciate your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress