

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 28, 2020

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The murder of Specialist (SPC) Vanessa Guillén, who had been missing for two months before Army investigators found her remains in the vicinity of Fort Hood, where she had been stationed, raises issues in how the Army conducts missing person investigations.

We are concerned that any shortcomings may not be limited to a single case or installation, and could be indicative of problems across the Armed Forces. For example, PV2 Gregory Morales went missing from Fort Hood on August 19, 2019, yet a reward was not offered for information about his whereabouts until June 2020, and his remains were found shortly thereafter. Two days ago, the likely remains of SGT Elder Fernandes were found 30 miles from Fort Hood, days after he went missing after being discharged from inpatient medical care, having previously reported abusive sexual contact. We believe that there must be a comprehensive review of the military's missing person investigation procedures to enhance search efforts in the future.

As the starting point for accountability and change, in order to correct past missteps and modernize the process, we write today to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a comprehensive review on the manner in which the Armed Forces handle cases of missing persons, desertion, and of members absent without leave or on an unauthorized absence. We would like for this review to include the following elements:

- (1) The procedures and guidelines established by each Armed Force for the investigation of cases of desertion and of members absent without leave or on an unauthorized absence.
- (2) The procedures and guidelines of the Armed Forces for distinguishing cases of members of the Armed Forces absent without leave from cases of members who are involuntarily absent.
- (3) The current procedures and guidelines for cooperation and coordination in investigations of such a case between military criminal investigative organizations or other military investigative agencies and—
 - (a) state and local law enforcement agencies; and
 - (b) Federal law enforcement agencies.
- (4) The current procedures and guidelines of the Armed Forces for use of media and social media in conjunction with such an investigation.

(5) Military resources available for such investigations, and any apparent shortfalls in such resources.

(6) The manner in which the procedures and guidelines for such investigations vary between Armed Forces.

(7) The manner in which the procedures and guidelines of the Armed Forces in such investigations vary from procedures and guidelines used by select state, local and Federal law enforcement agencies in such investigations.

(8) Any recognized best practices for responding to and investigating such cases.

(9) Any other matters the Comptroller General considers appropriate.

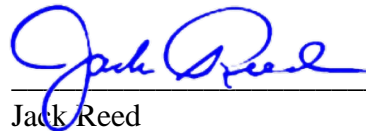
We request that this study be completed before December 16, 2021. We also request periodic briefings on your findings prior to the release of the final report. If you have any questions, please contact Mitchel Hochberg at Mitchel_Hochberg@Gillibrand.senate.gov and Brian Collins at Brian.Collins@mail.house.gov.

We appreciate GAO's attention to this critically important issue for military personnel.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Personnel
Senate Armed Services Committee



Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee



Jackie Speier
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel
House Armed Services Committee



Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee