

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 5, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write in response to the May 13, 2026, report from the Office of the Inspector General (IG) detailing the Department of Defense's (DoD or "the Department") failure under your leadership to support programs that protect civilians during armed conflict.¹ Specifically, the report found that under your leadership the Department is putting service members and DoD missions at risk by gutting civilian harm mitigation and response (CHMR) efforts,² and that the DoD no longer has the "personnel and capabilities" required to comply with the law and its congressionally-mandated CHMR responsibilities.³

These findings are particularly troubling in light of the spike in civilian harm caused by the Trump administration's ill-conceived war in Iran⁴ and Operation Rough Rider, during which nearly as many civilians were killed in two months than the previous two decades of U.S. operations in Yemen.⁵ Recently, there were new, disturbing reports of the U.S. military striking drinking water facilities in Iran, potentially cutting off water to 20,000 people in the height of summer heat.⁶ The Trump administration's military adventurism overseas, combined with its obvious disregard for civilians, do not make the American people or our service members safer.

We, therefore, request clarification about the steps the Department is taking to address these deficiencies and to protect civilians in line with the Department's strategic, legal, and moral obligations.

1 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, "Evaluation of the Do[D]'s Implementation of the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan," May 13, 2026,

https://media.defense.gov/2026/May/14/2003930527/-1/-1/1/DOWIG-2026-084_REDACTED%20SECURE.PDF.

2 *Id.*, p. 13.

3 *Id.*

4 New York Times, "Iran's Schools and Hospitals in Ruins, Times Analysis Shows," Leanne Abraham, Aurelien Breenen, and Bora Erden et. al., April 9, 2026,

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/04/09/world/middleeast/us-israel-strikes-iran-structures-damage.html>.

5 Airwars "The U.S. killed almost as many civilians in 52 days as the previous 23 years of U.S. action in Yemen," June 17, 2025, <https://trump-yemen.airwars.org/operation-rough-rider>.

6 New York Times, "Analysis of Satellite Image and Videos Suggest Precision U.S. Strikes on Iranian Water Facility," Christoph Koettl and Christiaan Triebert, June 11, 2026,

https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/10/world/middleeast/precision-strike-iran-water.html?unlocked_article_code=1.pVA.mE07.ig3kEYwQk57v&smid=url-share.

DoD’s Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan (CHMR-AP), established in 2022, outlined overdue and necessary steps to prevent, mitigate, and respond to harm coming from U.S. and partner military operations around the world.⁷ The May 13, 2026, IG report evaluated DoD’s implementation of the CHMR-AP, and its findings reveal that the Trump administration – potentially in violation of federal law – has defunded and impeded civilian protection efforts.⁸ The IG found that initial progress on CHMR-AP slowed due to hiring delays and a lack of strategic guidance from the senior leaders sitting on the initiative’s Steering Committee, but reported that DOD had “mostly completed implementation of 7 of 11 objectives and partially completed 4.”⁹ The IG, however, has since updated its assessment to classify all eleven objectives “at risk” under your leadership because DoD “stopped making progress on their implementation.”¹⁰

In response to indications that senior leaders at the Department intend to “eliminate or significantly reduce” CHMR guidance and institutions, the IG reports that DoD components had gone “inactive in their CHMR-AP responsibilities or actions to implement the CHMR-AP.”¹¹ According to the IG, combatant command staff “divested their [CHMR] personnel, functions, and responsibilities” and refused to “spend resources on actions or make future commitments.”¹² These revelations make real the concerns that we have previously raised about your complete “disregard for the strategic, legal, and moral imperative to minimize civilian harm.”¹³

The IG findings are consistent with disturbing public reporting that suggests around 90 percent of the CHMR mission has been dismantled.¹⁴ Effective CHMR requires putting in place the appropriate capabilities, resources, personnel, and systems to track, respond to, and prevent harm.¹⁵ The IG found, however, that dedicated “CHMR personnel [have] left their positions” across the DoD, and the legally-mandated Civilian Protection Center of Excellence (CP CoE) has

7 U.S. Department of Defense, “Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan (CHMR-AP),” August 25, 2022, p. I, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Aug/25/2003064740/-1/-1/1/CIVILIAN-HARM-MITIGATION-ANDRESPONSE-ACTION-PLAN.PDF>.

8 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, “Evaluation of the Do[D]’s Implementation of the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan,” May 13, 2026, p. 12, https://media.defense.gov/2026/May/14/2003930527/-1/-1/1/DOWIG-2026-084_REDACTED%20SECURE.PDF.

9 *Id.*, p. 5.

10 *Id.*, p. 23.

11 *Id.*, p. 12.

12 *Id.*

13 Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to DoD Secretary Pete Hegseth, April 19, 2026, p. 2, https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_from_warren_van_hollen_dems_to_secretary_hegseth_on_civilian_harm_war_in_iran.pdf.

14 ProPublica, “The U.S. Built a Blueprint to Avoid Civilian War Casualties. Trump Officials Scrapped It.,” Hannah Allam, March 10, 2026, <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-defense-department-iran-hegseth-civilian-casualties>.

15 Center for Civilians in Conflict, “Protecting Together, Preventing, Mitigating, and Addressing Civilian Harm, A Framework for Evaluating Policy and Practice,” August 1, 2022, pp. 16-33, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/tools/toolkit-advancing-protection-of-civilians-in-conflict/>.

been left without key staff and leadership.¹⁶ The Department of the Army also halted funding for a CHMR data management platform and defunded training efforts on civilian protection.¹⁷

The Department's failure to implement the CHMR-AP has profound consequences for civilians in conflict zones and makes service members' jobs harder and riskier. Officials from the Joint Staff and combatant commands told the IG that eliminating CHMR funding and personnel "harms readiness" and "increases risk to military personnel and objectives and mission success."¹⁸ Specifically, gutting CHMR programs leads to "target misidentification [that] harms readiness by wasting Do[D] munitions" and increases the operational risk of "civilian casualties, damaged coalitions and alliances, loss of legitimacy, increased local resistance, propaganda opportunities for adversaries, prolonged conflicts, and failed strikes."¹⁹

The IG report is merely the latest evidence of the strategic and military importance of the Department's efforts to mitigate civilian harm. General and Flag Officers, veteran and family organizations, and other national security experts have repeatedly linked civilian protection and operational success.²⁰ For example, Retired Brigadier General Matthew Isler, who led Air Force Counter-ISIS operations in Mosul, Iraq in 2017, suggests that civilian protection "accelerates campaign success, preserves combat power," and "protects warfighters."²¹ CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper echoed that sentiment during his confirmation hearing, stating that civilian harm "risks degrading our credibility and trust and puts troops at risk,"²² and SOCOM Commander Frank Bradley called protecting civilians "critical to our success."²³ Senior defense officials have also recognized the positive results of CHMR reforms under the CHMR-AP. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dan Caine, touted the positive impacts of the

16 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, "Evaluation of the Do[D]'s Implementation of the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan," May 13, 2026, p. 12,

https://media.defense.gov/2026/May/14/2003930527/-1/-1/1/DOWIG-2026-084_REDACTED%20SECURE.PDF.

17 *Id.*

18 *Id.*, p.13.

19 *Id.*

20 Center for Civilians in Conflict, "US Military Voices Speak Out in Support of Civilian Protection," Madison Hunke, July 1, 2025, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/us-military-voices-speak-out-in-support-of-civilian-protection>; ProPublica, "The U.S. Built a Blueprint to Avoid Civilian War Casualties. Trump Officials Scrapped It.," Hannah Allam, March 10, 2026, <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-defense-department-iran-hegseth-civilian-casualties>; Politico, "Hegseth ignored military officials when he slashed offices that limit risk to civilians," Jack Detsch and Paul McLeary, March 13, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/13/military-leaders-warned-hegseth-not-to-gut-offices-that-limit-risk-to-civilians-00827722>.

21 Center for Civilians in Conflict, "US Military Voices Speak Out in Support of Civilian Protection," Madison Hunke, July 1, 2025, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/us-military-voices-speak-out-in-support-of-civilian-protection>.

22 Senate Armed Services Committee, "To consider the nominations of: Vice Admiral Charles B. Cooper II, USN to be Admiral and Commander, United States Central Command; and Lieutenant General Alexis G. Grynkwich, USAF to be general and Commander, United States European Command and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe," June 24, 2025, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/62425fullnomtranscript.pdf>.

23 Senate Armed Services Committee, "To Consider the Nominations of Vice Admiral Frank M. Bradley, USN, to be Admiral and Commander, United States Special Operations Command; and Lieutenant General Dagvin R.M. Anderson, USAF, to be General and Commander, United States Africa Command," July 22, 2025, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/to-consider-the-nominations-of-vice-admiral-frank-m-bradley-usn-to-be-admiral-and-commander-united-states-special-operations-command-and-lieutenant-general-dagvin-rm-anderson-usaf-to-be-general-and-commander-united-states-africa-command>.

DoD CHMR programs at combatant commands.²⁴ Colby Jenkins, who at the time was performing the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operation and Low-Intensity Conflict, noted that the CP CoE has supported the special operations community by “enhancing operational effectiveness, increasing battlefield awareness, and minimizing harm caused to civilians.”²⁵

The IG report also indicates that, under your leadership, the Department is failing to comply with congressionally-mandated obligations to protect civilians. The Department has two specific legal obligations for its CHMR efforts, directed by Congress on a bipartisan basis.²⁶ First, the Department is required to (1) have a civilian harm policy with specific criteria and (2) fully comply with the policy.²⁷ To comply, the office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)) developed DoD Instruction 3000.17 (“the DoDI”) and released the document in 2023.²⁸ This DoDI established the Department’s civilian harm policy as well as roles and responsibilities for civilian protection efforts. Second, the Secretary of Defense is legally required to operate a CP CoE that performs specific duties, including developing guidance, training, and lessons learned about CHMR to incorporate into operations, doctrine, and planning.²⁹

But the IG investigation found that the Department’s failure to implement the CHMR-AP means it “does not have all of the personnel and capabilities in place to fully comply with DoDI 3000.17, the CHMR policy required by 10 U.S.C. § 134.”³⁰ The report also found that the “CP CoE does not have all of the necessary tools anticipated to perform its statutory purposes.”³¹ As a byproduct of the failure to implement the CHMR-AP and DoDI, components across the Department are delinquent in their CHMR responsibilities. For example, as of February 2025, CENTCOM was operating without a command CHMR regulation – and may still be – despite engaging in operations that put civilians at risk.³² When confronted by the Pentagon’s failure to comply with federal law, USD(P) refused to produce a plan to get back in compliance.³³ In lieu

24 Senate Armed Services Committee, “Advance Policy Questions for Lieutenant General John Daniel Caine (USAF), Retired, Nominee for Appointment to Grade of General and to the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” April 2025, p. 10, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/caine_apq_responses.pdf.

25 Response from Performing the Duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict Colby Jenkins to Questions for the Record from U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, June 10, 2025, [On file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren].

26 10 U.S.C. 134; 10 U.S.C. 184.

27 10 U.S.C. 134.

28 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, “DoD Instruction 3000.17, Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response,” December 21, 2023, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/300017p.pdf>.

29 10 U.S.C. 184.

30 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, “Evaluation of the Do[D]’s Implementation of the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan,” May 13, 2026, p. 13, https://media.defense.gov/2026/May/14/2003930527/-1/-1/1/DOWIG-2026-084_REDACTED%20SECURE.PDF.

31 *Id.*

32 *Id.*, p. 7.

33 *Id.*, p. 29.

of a plan, Under Secretary Colby cited the ongoing review of the CP CoE – a review that is now six months overdue by Colby’s own timeline.³⁴

In addition to our concerns about your abandonment of legally-mandated civilian protection efforts at DoD, we are also troubled that it appears DoD failed to cooperate with the IG.³⁵ In advance of your confirmation, you committed to “protecting the independence” of the IG, and told Congress that you would “compl[y] with...deadlines established for requested communications, providing witnesses, providing documents.”³⁶ Similarly, Under Secretary Colby committed that he would “ensure...compliance with the Office of the Inspector General deadlines” and “comply with requests in a timely manner.”³⁷ Yet, the IG report reveals systematic failure to honor those commitments. As written in the report, Mr. Colby’s office “did not provide the requested business rules or governing documents,” for CHMR-AP implementation, “denied [IG] request[s] to observe a [Steering Committee] meeting,” and withheld access to the Department tools that track implementation.³⁸

To address our concerns about the operational and legal consequences of the Department’s mismanagement of CHMR resources, we request answers to each of the following questions no later than July 19, 2026:

Questions

1. Why did the DoD fail to fully comply with the IG’s inquiry?
 - a. Why did DoD withhold documentation of the CHMR Steering Committee’s business rules or governing documents?
 - b. Why did the DoD deny the IG access to observe a Steering Committee meeting?
 - c. Why did the DoD not provide the IG access to the ADVANA platform to validate CHMR-AP implementation reporting for itself?
2. The response of the USD(P) notes that the Department is conducting a review of its civilian harm policy to “ensure that [it reflects] the current leadership’s priorities and direction.”³⁹ While the review is underway, is the Department currently fully complying with the policy guidance in DoDI 3000.17? How?
 - a. How do changes in funding for platforms and tools established through the CHMR-AP – including, but not limited to, the data management platform and Army Red Teaming School – impact the Department’s ability to comply with DoDI 3000.17?

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*, p. 23.

³⁶ Response from Secretary of Defense Nominee Pete Hegseth to Questions for the Record from U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, January 19, 2025, [On file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren].

³⁷ Response from Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Nominee Elbridge Colby to Questions for the Record from U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, March 12, 2025, [On file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren].

³⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, “Evaluation of the Do[D]’s Implementation of the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan,” May 13, 2026, p. 23,

https://media.defense.gov/2026/May/14/2003930527/-1/-1/1/DOWIG-2026-084_REDACTED%20SECURE.PDF.

³⁹ *Id.*, p. 29.

3. What process will the Department follow to ensure a comprehensive review of CHMR policy?
 - a. Who is responsible for the review?
 - b. Will the Department commit to briefing the members of Congress on the process and findings of the review?
 - c. What is the specific timeline for completion of the review?
4. What is the status of the adoption of command-specific policies on CHMR at each of the combatant commands?
 - a. The IG noted that the CENTCOM command-level policy was incomplete as of February 2025.⁴⁰ Has the policy since been completed, and was it in place before the commencement of operations in Iran in February 2026?
5. Is the Department fully complying with CHMR responsibilities in other DoD Directives, including DoD Directive 5132.03 on Security Cooperation? How?
6. Provide copies of other policy documents that address CHMR based on guidance from the CHMR-AP, including the Interim Policy Guidance on Supporting U.S. Ally and Partner Forces in Their Efforts to Mitigate and Respond to Civilian Harm.⁴¹
7. Provide copies of CHMR-related updates made to joint doctrine in the 2024-2026 time frame, including updates to Joint Publications 1-0, 2-0, 3-0, 3-16, 3-20, 3-33, 3-60, and 5-0.⁴²
8. Provide copies of the CHMR Steering Committee's business rules and governing documents.
9. Has the Department reallocated congressionally-appropriated funding meant for CHMR efforts? How much funding and to which other initiatives?
10. In fiscal year 2026 (FY26) Congress appropriated \$11.6 million for conflict operations analysis and explicitly communicated its intent to DoD that the funding be used for CHMR. How has OSD used that funding, and does this use align with the intended purpose of the \$11.6 million?
11. How many full-time personnel were dedicated to CHMR in January 2025 across the Department, including at the combatant commands and in the Military Departments? Please disaggregate by office, role, and employment status (contractor, civil service, active duty).
 - a. How many part-time or dual-hatted personnel were dedicated to the CHMR mission in January 2025? Please provide an estimated level of effort dedicated to CHMR and disaggregate by office, role, and employment status (contractor, civil service, active duty).
 - b. Did CHMR personnel counted as full-time in this estimate have any collateral, non-CHMR duties in January 2025? If so, what duties?
12. How many CHMR personnel have been re-allocated or terminated since January 2025? If personnel have been re-allocated, on which missions and in which offices are they now working?
13. How many full-time personnel are now dedicated to the CHMR mission? Please disaggregate by office, role, and employment status (contractor, civil service, active duty).

⁴⁰ *Id.*, p. 7.

⁴¹ *Id.*, p. 8

⁴² *Id.*, p. 7.

- a. How many part-time or dual-hatted personnel are now dedicated to the CHMR mission? Please provide an estimated level of effort dedicated to CHMR and disaggregate by office, role, and employment status (contractor, civil service, active duty).
 - b. Do CHMR personnel counted as full-time in this estimate have any collateral, non-CHMR duties? If so, what duties?
14. According to the IG, the Steering Committee overseeing the Department’s CHMR efforts, including CHMR-AP implementation, has been dormant since December 2024.⁴³
- a. How frequently has the Steering Committee been convened since its inception?
 - b. Has the Steering Committee convened since December 2024?
 - c. Does the Steering Committee remain co-chaired by the USD(P), Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Under Secretary of Defense for Comptroller?
 - d. Who are the standing members of the Steering Committee?
 - e. Is the office of the USD(P) still the Executive Secretariat for the Steering Committee? If so, what support activities is the Executive Secretariat performing currently?
 - f. Can the Department produce the agendas, briefing documents, and summaries of conclusion for all meetings of the Steering Committee since its inception?
15. The response of the USD(P) notes that the Department is conducting a review of the CP CoE to “ensure that [it reflects] the current leadership’s priorities and direction.”⁴⁴ Given the Under Secretary’s estimate for a January 2026 completion, what is the Department’s updated assessment on when it will complete the review?
16. What is the current staffing and structure of the CP CoE, and is it equipped to meet the statutory requirements for its operations?
- a. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to develop standardized civilian-harm operational reporting and data management processes to improve data collection, sharing, and learning across DoD?
 - b. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to develop, recommend, and review guidance, and the implementation of guidance, on how the Department responds to civilian harm?
 - c. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to develop recommended guidance for addressing civilian harm across the full spectrum of armed conflict and for use in doctrine and operational plans?
 - d. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to recommend training and exercises for the prevention and investigation of civilian harm?
 - e. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to develop a repository of civilian casualty and civilian harm information?
 - f. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to capture lessons learned from assessments and investigations of civilian casualty incidents and supporting institutionalization of such lessons learned within policy, doctrine, training, exercises, and tactics, techniques, and procedures of the DoD?
 - g. What activities has the CP CoE been engaged in in FY26 to support the coordination and synchronization of efforts across combatant commands, the

⁴³ *Id.*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, p. 29.

Department of State, and other relevant United States Government departments and agencies to prevent, mitigate, and respond to incidents of civilian harm?

- h. In FY26, how has the CP CoE engaged with nongovernmental organizations and civilian casualty experts?
- 17. Does DoD assess that the U.S. was responsible for striking civilian infrastructure in Iran on June 10, 2026? If so, was DoD aware prior to the strikes that it was directly targeting or may hit water storage facilities?
- 18. What was the legal justification for the targeting decision under the law of armed conflict? Provide any written records of the legal analysis and justification for the strike.
- 19. Has DoD assessed the second order impacts of the strikes on June 10, 2026 on civilians, including how many civilians were deprived of access to water? If so, provide that analysis.
- 20. Has DoD initiated a review of these strikes, and if so, does the Department commit to sharing the results of that review with Congress?

Sincerely,



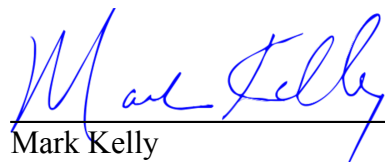
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



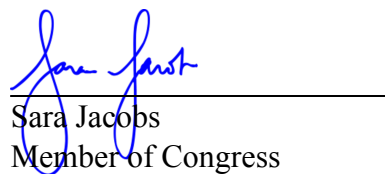
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



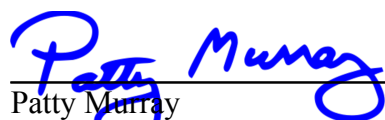
Jason Crow
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Andy Kim

Andy Kim
United States Senator