

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 26, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Department of Defense
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write regarding personnel record issues for Guardsmen of the Vermont Air National Guard's 158th Fighter Wing, whose critical skills were requested by name during an unprecedented deployment—first to the Caribbean and subsequently to the Middle East—in 2025 and 2026. These record-keeping issues have caused and may continue to cause unnecessary administrative burdens for our Guardsmen while they are deployed under extremely difficult circumstances, and significant financial strain for families at home. We request your urgent assistance in correcting any errors.

The Vermont Air National Guard's 158th Fighter Wing was the first National Guard unit to transition directly across multiple named operations without a change in duty status, from Operation Southern Spear to Operations Absolute Resolve, Spartan Shield, and Epic Fury. This unique deployment exposed significant gaps in the Department of Defense's deployment attribution and personnel, accounting, and orders-management systems, and the rapid transition between operations supported with different funding authorities led to Guardsmen serving under one mission while physically executing another.

These discrepancies have resulted in inconsistent mission attribution, inaccurate deployment histories, pay and entitlement calculation errors, combat zone tax exemption eligibility issues, disparities in Basic Allowance for Housing adjustments, and other administrative record problems. If not corrected promptly, these military record discrepancies could affect eligibility for VA benefits, including Post 9/11 Bill and other service-connected benefits. Additional impacts may not be fully understood until members return to Vermont.

Our Guardsmen have demonstrated remarkable professionalism under demanding and rapidly evolving circumstances. It is imperative that military personnel records accurately reflect duty status, and that associated benefits are delivered in a timely manner so that these Guardsmen and their families can remain focused on their mission and not return home to a bureaucratic headache.

We are also disappointed that reforms to prevent similar errors in the future were not included in the Senate's FY27 National Defense Authorization Act as passed out of committee on June 11, 2026. As Congress continues to debate the FY27 NDAA, we respectfully request your urgent assistance to ensure that the 158th Fighter Wing's deployment documentation is corrected without delay, including proper operational duty location records, activation and deployment dates, and associated pay and tax treatment. We also request a briefing on the actions the Department is taking to promptly address these issues, including making any regulatory or internal process changes needed to avoid this issue for future National Guard deployments.

We request a response no later than Friday, July 24. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and for your continued support of our Guardsmen and their families.

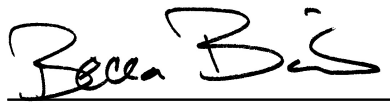
Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Becca Balint
Member of Congress