

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 22, 2022

Mr. Maher Bitar
Anomalous Health Incidents Interagency Coordinator
National Security Council
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Bitar:

Congratulations on your recent designation as the Anomalous Health Incidents Interagency Coordinator. You assume the responsibilities of this position at a uniquely pivotal time in the investigation into anomalous health incidents (AHIs) and ongoing efforts to care for those affected. We are heartened at the seriousness with which President Biden and his officials have approached AHIs over the past year. However, it is now imperative that the administration improve the coordination of action and messaging across the Federal government on this important issue.

In the past year, Federal departments and agencies have issued workforce guidance memoranda acknowledging the threat, created mechanisms to self-report suspected exposures and advised personnel on known steps to defend against possible exposure. Most important, victims who have spent years struggling to have their voices heard are finally receiving the care they need and the recognition they deserve. Passage of our bipartisan bill, the *HAVANA Act* (P.L. 117-46), will ensure that victims of AHIs will receive compensation for their injuries in service to our country. We look forward to receiving a report on estimated costs for implementation of the *HAVANA Act* to relevant committees on March 1. Our national security agencies have begun to focus their attention on assessing the cause of these incidents and who may be behind them. Experts have been convened from across the scientific spectrum to offer their insights and assessments, and health care professionals have adopted more refined approaches to care that are finally offering victims relief.

However, more must be done. Though the recent public release of two separate intelligence community (IC) reports is a step toward greater transparency, they did not fully reflect the views of all agencies, including those beyond the IC, undermining the opportunity for a coordinated public message. This diminished what has been an improved consistency in information provided to the public, victims and the Congress over the past year. Press reports describing the perspectives of one or more agencies do not always represent the interagency consensus, muddying the limited set of information available to the public. The lack of clarity and answers can further erode the confidence in the U.S. Government's efforts among this vulnerable group of victims, some of whom have waited years for Federal support and access to treatment. Improved coordination in analysis and messaging, even where there are legitimate differences in assessments, is vital.

We have heard from victims about their challenging paths to receive care. Implementation of guidance to help victims has been uneven inside Federal agencies, with some victims waiting months for procedural approvals while others speed through, seemingly dependent on which organizations individuals serve in. Equitable access to high-quality care remains a persistent challenge and dependents of victims that may have suffered the same exposure may not be adequately captured in the population of impacted individuals, depriving them of care and consideration consistent with their injuries. Finally, while communication with the victim community has improved, more steps must be taken to reduce stigma and rebuild trust by promoting engagement between agencies and victims.

We look forward to the forthcoming designation of senior Agency Coordination Leads across the interagency and expected improvements to self-reporting systems within Federal agencies to simplify and streamline access to care. We anticipate receiving regular, fully coordinated briefings to Congress by the Agency Coordination Leads on the progress of the investigation and updates on victim care, consistent with the requirements we established in section 6603 of the *Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act* (P.L.117-81). Your leadership on this important matter is critical to the continued progress for victims, their families and our public servants serving the nation at home and abroad.

Thank you for your persistent attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you on these issues going forward.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator