

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Kenneth J. Braithwaite
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4D652
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Braithwaite,

We write to request additional information regarding Naval Sea Systems Command's (NAVSEA) decision to rescind the weather and safety policy for employees at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) and the transition process for high-risk employees to return to work. We recognize the important work of our shipyard employees in maintaining the readiness of our fast attack submarine fleet, and we appreciate the communication we have received from shipyard leadership. However, we urge the Navy to continue to strike the right balance between maximizing the productivity of the workforce while minimizing the risk associated with the COVID-19 health emergency, especially for those at the highest risk.

As you may know, PNSY developed a four-phase approach in order to return the workforce to full strength. The first phase began on June 1, 2020, and was set to align with guidance put forth by the State of Maine. We understand that employees with higher risk of severe illness began returning to the shipyard on June 29th. As the transition to full strength begins, we would appreciate a response to the following questions so that we may better understand the processes in place to ensure the safety of the workforce.

1. What specific actions are being taken to ensure the health and safety of workers as the shipyard returns to full strength?
2. What are the metrics PNSY used to determine when it was safe for employees to return?
3. What are the metrics PNSY will use to determine when it may no longer be safe for certain employees to remain on the shipyard should there be a "second wave"?
4. What procedures does the Navy plan to implement in order to identify new cases of COVID-19 as the shipyard returns to full strength?
5. What will be the health and safety requirements for those employees who return to work in close quarters (i.e. within 6 feet of another worker)? Are those measures already in place? Will any changes be made to existing policies? Do these policies vary between shipyards or is it a uniform standard?
6. Are individuals who live with a high-risk person guaranteed to be granted leave under another policy? What will happen to a high-risk employee if they refuse to return to work out of fear for their own personal health and safety or that of someone they live with?
7. How many cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed on the shipyard since June 1, 2020?

We are grateful to the men and women at PNSY who continue to perform critical work to support the national security of the United States during the COVID-19 health emergency. Finally, we recognize

that the work is so important that it cannot stop during this challenging time, but the health and welfare of our shipyard employees is paramount. We respectfully request an update on the Navy's transition plans and urge you to collaborate with the shipyard leadership to ensure that they can safely return to work.

Thank you for your service and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Ann McLane Kuster
United States Representative



Chellie Pingree
United States Representative



Chris Pappas
United States Representative



Jared Golden
United States Representative

CC: Vice Admiral William Galinis, Commander, Naval Sea Systems Command