

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 22, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary
The United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to convey our ongoing concern regarding access and equity of medical treatment for State Department employees and their family members who have reported symptoms consistent with anomalous health incidents (AHIs). We are particularly concerned that some State Department employees with such symptoms who have been recommended for treatment have been refused access to Walter Reed National Medical Military Care Center by the Department of State, despite their requests to be seen at Walter Reed. We request that you investigate why this happened and undertake efforts to ensure State Department employees and their dependents have the same access to care as AHI victims from the Department of Defense.

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center has become widely regarded as the center of excellence and preeminent destination for treatment and care for AHI victims within the federal government. Although this facility is operated by the Department of Defense (DoD), victims from other agencies have been able to access treatment at the facility on the condition that there is capacity for non-DoD victims. In conversations with victims, we have found that they have been very grateful and impressed with the treatment and quality of care which they have received. This strong reputation has encouraged other victims to come forward and request treatment at this facility.

Legislation in the Senate, if passed, would accelerate the DoD's approval process to grant non-DoD AHI victims access to assessment and treatment at Walter Reed. Although not all victims may wish to proceed with treatment at Walter Reed, we believe that equity in access to care must be a foundational principle in responding to the needs of victims. No victim must feel that there is a difference in treatment options as a result of their employing agency.

We ask that the State Department review its policies to ensure that any U.S. government employee who seeks a referral from the State Department to seek assessment and treatment for their AHI be granted the request, subject to space limitations at Walter Reed. Every U.S. government employee, regardless of their home agency, must be given the same equitable access to care. We welcome efforts to broaden treatment options to care for this vulnerable population, but ask that the right to receive care from the center of excellence be a decision based on medical need and the wishes of the victim. We see no reason why the State Department and DoD cannot allow for equity for all government employees in access to care at Walter Reed. We note that if a

legislative solution is required, or if the Department cannot sufficiently remedy this issue, we are willing to legislate accordingly.

To better understand the circumstances under which treatment at Walter Reed is made available for State Department employees and their family members, we also request a written explanation that details the situations in which qualifying victims are granted or denied assessment and treatment at Walter Reed, the factors that go into such a decision, and by whom such a decision is made and approved.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Susan Collins
United States Senator