

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 13, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable James E. McPherson
Acting Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Secretary Esper and Secretary McPherson:

In March, the Navy issued direction to each of its four public shipyards intended to limit the potential exposure of shipyard workers to COVID-19, while maximizing the important national security work they accomplish. This included the use of telework, as well as permitting the most vulnerable workers to take paid administrative leave (weather & safety) based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, such as for older individuals or those who have preexisting health conditions, and those who have family members with preexisting health conditions. The Navy further authorized individuals who were sick or symptomatic to take administrative leave to further minimize the risk to other workers.

While we appreciate the actions the Department of Defense and the Navy took at the outset of this pandemic to protect workers at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and other public shipyards, we want to express our strong concern about the recent decision to end paid administrative leave, particularly for individuals who are currently sick or symptomatic.

As COVID-19 continues to spread across our nation, many states, such as Maine and New Hampshire, have extended their shelter-at-home guidance through at least the end of April. This is why we were so concerned to hear that DOD altered this guidance, which will take effect on April 14 at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Under this new guidance, employees who live with at-risk members in their household with preexisting health conditions, or who are sick or symptomatic, will now be required to utilize accrued sick leave or annual leave. This change in leave policy comes on the heels of the tragic loss of one of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's civilian employees to COVID-19.

We believe the administrative leave policy initially put in place was essential to protecting our most vulnerable shipyard workers and their family members, while also helping to avoid the potential spread of COVID-19 at our nation's shipyards. Maintaining safe social distancing practices as recommended by the CDC can be especially difficult at shipyards given the

complexities of working aboard submarines and ships.

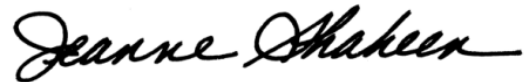
Accordingly, we ask the Department of Defense and Navy to reinstate the initial personnel guidance to ensure the health of the public shipyard industrial base workforce as well as the rest of our defense workforce. At a minimum, we believe the Departments should ensure that those who are currently on administrative leave because they are sick or symptomatic be permitted to remain on administrative leave until their health improves. We do not believe this is the time to create impediments or disincentives for sick or high-risk workers to stay home if necessary, as may be the case if they do not have any sick leave or other forms of paid leave available to them.

Again, thank you for your attention to this important issue, and we look forward to your prompt response.

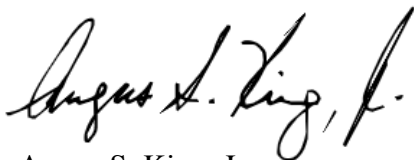
Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress