

United States Senate

May 10, 2019

Captain Jeff Bernard
Joint Base Commander
Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam

Colonel Thomas J. Barrett
Garrison Commander
U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii
Schofield Barracks, HI

Colonel Raul Lianez
Commanding Officer
Marine Corps Base Hawaii

Dear CAPT Bernard, COL Barrett, and Col. Lianez:

I write concerning the condition of privatized housing at our installations and the Department of Defense (DoD)'s oversight of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI) in Hawaii.

In recent weeks, I have visited privatized housing and heard directly from military families. I am troubled to learn that service members and their families in Hawaii face the same hardships with the MHPI that other families have encountered at bases across the country. These include:

- **Persistent health and safety issues:** Families face exposure to mold and pest infestation linked to poorly maintained HVAC and ventilation systems and in home flooding related to drain line blockages. Families with whom I have met complained that it takes on average three to six months for these issues to get resolved when they raise them with the housing partner. Moreover, families living in historic homes have suggested that housing partners often cut corners or ignore work order requests because of the level of complexity for repair work in these homes;
- **Poor customer service:** Besides not completing work orders in a timely manner or at all, housing partners also put the onus on families to prove that there is a problem before they will agree to service their home. Families told me that they had to complain several times, often over several months, and incur out-of-pocket expenses for laboratory tests for which they did not receive reimbursement to prove mold and other health-related issues before the housing partner would take action; and
- **Flawed quality control and assurance:** Housing partners use after-hours call centers based outside the United States to service work orders placed in early afternoon in Hawaii. Families with whom I met complained about consistent miscommunication resulting from language barriers that exacerbated the housing partner's ability to respond to work orders and ensure concerns are appropriately resolved. DoD housing offices in Hawaii also rely on self-reported data from a housing partner which limits our ability to conduct auditing to guarantee that families' requests are addressed in a timely manner.

I am also troubled to learn that families have faced challenges when raising their concerns about a housing partner with their chain of command. While I recognize that each of you has worked to address these concerns and strengthen accountability over the housing partners in recent weeks by conducting 100 percent contact visits and holding town halls, it is clear to me that we must do more to earn back the trust of our service members and their families.

To understand the extent of the challenge and your efforts to take corrective action, I request the following information related to the housing partners that you oversee at your installations:

Work Classification

- Please provide the list of work-related requests that your housing office classifies as “public health and safety.”
- What guidance do you provide the housing partner to ensure work is properly classified as “public health and safety?”
- What accountability measures exist to ensure housing partners are classifying “public health and safety” issues appropriately?
- Do you place any specific standards—such as response time and temporary relocation of the residents—on housing partners for work classified as “public health and safety?”

Status of Work

- How many work orders did your housing partner have open prior to the 100 percent contact of residents? How many of these work orders were older than 30 days? 60 days?
- How many work orders were classified as “public health and safety?”
- How many work orders are currently open following the 100 percent contact of residents? How many are currently older than 30 days? 60 days?
- How many are classified as “public health and safety?”
- On average, how long does it take the housing partner to complete a work order request after a resident opens one?
- What is the average time to complete work classified as “public health and safety?”
- Please describe the circumstances and frequency for when the housing partner is unable to close work orders—including ones classified as “public health and safety.”
- What is the follow-up process with families for when a work order cannot be completed?

Quality Control and Assurance

- Do military families have access to view the status of their work order?
- What is the process by which a military family raises concerns with the chain of command regarding work order requests?
- What actions does the chain of command take to ensure work orders are resolved appropriately?
- What auditing or accountability does the chain of command have to ensure a housing partner’s self-reported data are accurate?
- Please describe what audit and accountability changes, if any, you have made to the MHPI at your installation since the 100 percent contact of residents earlier this spring.

I look forward to receiving answers to the above questions so that we can work together to strengthen oversight and accountability of our housing partners and provide safe and healthy homes to our military families in Hawaii. This includes providing you with the additional staffing resources you need in your housing offices to increase oversight and the ability to audit the self-reported data that our housing partners are providing you so that we can have confidence that they are completing the work they claim to be doing.

In addition to the information above, I request a joint meeting with each of you and your housing directors so that we can discuss these challenges and the way forward. A member of my staff will follow up to schedule a meeting during the next available state work period. In the meantime, I appreciate your shared commitment to the wellbeing of our service members and their families and look forward to your prompt attention to this letter.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs
and Related Agencies