

February 5, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Austin,

I write to you today to ask that you take steps to investigate a disturbing pattern of incidents involving the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter. In the past month, two UH-60 crashes have resulted in the tragic deaths of six members of the National Guard. Since December of 2019, there have now been three crashes involving the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, which have claimed the lives of nine members of our nation's National Guard.

On the evening of January 20, 2021, three members of the New York National Guard tragically perished during a routine training mission involving the UH-60 helicopter. The UH-60 was based at the Army Aviation Support Facility at the Greater Rochester International Airport. Less than two weeks later, on February 2, 2021, three members of the Idaho National Guard perished in a helicopter crash outside of Boise. Those brave service members similarly piloted a UH-60 helicopter on a routine training mission. These tragic events followed a December 2019 crash near St. Cloud, Minnesota, which took the lives of three members of the Minnesota National Guard also piloting a UH-60 helicopter.

In 2020, the summary of results of the St. Cloud crash, investigated by the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center at Fort Rucker, concluded that the helicopter's number one engine failed during a maximum power check while the number two engine was in an idle setting, causing a dual engine-out condition. The failure was attributed to the incorrect installation of the engine's hydromechanical unit.

In a separate incident in late August, 2020, a crash near San Clemente Island, California took the lives of two members of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. These soldiers were piloting an MH-60 helicopter, a variation of the UH-60 Black Hawk.

At this time, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center at Fort Rucker is investigating the recent crashes outside of Rochester and Boise. These incidents are being investigated as disparate events. However, three crashes involving the National Guard's use of the UH-60 in just over a year raises significant concerns about a systemic issue with the Black Hawk helicopter operation cycle. The further case of the MH-60 crash raises additional questions that we urgently need answered.

Accordingly, I ask that you take all necessary steps to promptly investigate these incidents to determine if they fit a larger pattern of malfunction with the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter. If so, I ask that the Department of Defense produce recommendations and guidance regarding the operational readiness of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter and its crew to ensure the safety of our service members. I also request that you provide a classified briefing on the status of (1) your investigation into the tragic deaths of these service-members, (2) any mechanical, software, electrical, or other problems with the UH-60 Black Hawk that cause it to malfunction or make it further difficult to pilot, and (3) the Department of Defense's plan to

rectify this issue. Because of the ongoing danger posed to our service members, I ask for this briefing to occur as soon as the disparate investigations are complete.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator