

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

July 12, 2022

The Honorable Christine Wormuth
Secretary
United States Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310

The Honorable Frank Kendall
Secretary
United States Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Wormuth and Secretary Kendall:

We write to express our continued concern with the ongoing lack of child care for our U.S. Army 7th Special Forces Group operators and families at Camp Bull Simons on Eglin Air Force Base (AFB). We continue to hear from many in the community about the lack of access to a Child Development Center (CDC) due to long distances and lengthy waiting lists. The stories are heart-wrenching, and the impact this is having on both families and readiness is unacceptable.

Since our February 2020 letter to then U.S. Army Secretary McCarthy, we have engaged the leadership of Eglin AFB and held discussions with others across the U.S. Department of Defense to better understand the problem, make sure the appropriate teams were communicating with one another, and find a path forward. After these discussions, we are concerned with the shortcomings by the Air Force in facilitating an appropriate and timely solution for the impacted soldiers of 7th SFG on Camp Bull Simons.

While we are grateful for the temporary solution of partnering with two private childcare facilities in Okaloosa and Santa Rosa Counties, one of these facilities will not be operational for some time. The other is nearly an hour drive, each way, from the 7th SFG compound. Further, neither facility has the capacity to meet the demand of the community, many of whom do not put themselves on the waitlist for main base Eglin's CDC because the cost of gas and time spent traveling is prohibitive. The lack of urgency and failure to understand the depth of the impact this is having on our operators is growing increasingly frustrating for us and for our constituents.

We are pursuing language in the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act to work toward rectifying this wrong as quickly as possible, but the decision to take care of our operators and their families comes down to the two of you. It is critical to provide a solution to the acute short-term need, and be forward looking to find a solution capable of accommodating the right number of children at a location that is easily accessible for the operators serving at Camp Bull Simons.

Those who raise their hand and volunteer to serve in our armed forces, and their families, make great sacrifices to protect and defend our nation. They require their leaders to deliver what was promised when they signed up. When we fail to deliver for our service members, lethality

declines, quality of life drops, morale plummets, and retention rates fall. Further, we have recently learned of the alarming decline in recruitment, which is to be expected when the Department of Defense continues to fail our service members and their families.

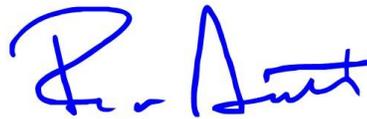
As the Army dictum goes: “mission first, people always.” We must take concrete steps to ensure that this is more than just a slogan. Taking care of our operators’ children is an obvious place to start, and addressing this issue must be a top priority.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator