

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

November 24, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

Whistleblowers and inspectors general (IGs) play a critical role in exposing fraud, saving taxpayer dollars, and investigating misconduct across the federal government. Countless IG audits and investigations began with courageous federal workers coming forward to tell their stories.¹ Despite the clear value of whistleblowers and IGs to the American people, you recently launched an overhaul of the Department of Defense (DOD) Office of Inspector General (OIG) in what experts have called “a coordinated assault on oversight, accountability, and whistleblowers.”² We write to request documents and information pertaining to these changes.

On September 30, 2025, you and President Trump held a gathering of top generals and admirals at Quantico, Virginia. In the address, you stated your intent to overhaul complaint reporting processes.³ You also stated without any evidence that the IG has been “weaponized,” despite the fact that the DOD OIG is an independent and credible oversight entity that has delivered a \$4 return on every taxpayer dollar it spends.⁴

Immediately following this address, you issued several memoranda that reflect a new ethos of the Trump Administration’s DOD. This included a memo to all secretaries of military departments entitled, “IG Oversight and Reform: Enhancing Timeliness, Transparency, and Due

¹ *Whistleblowers Risk Everything—Lawmakers Must Protect Them*, Government Executive (Oct. 28, 2021) (online at www.govexec.com/oversight/2021/10/whistleblowers-risk-everythinglawmakers-must-protect-them/186441).

² “Assault on Oversight”: *Hegseth Overhaul of Military Watchdogs Spurs Concern*, Reuters (Oct. 2, 2025) (online at www.reuters.com/world/assault-oversight-hegseth-overhaul-military-watchdogs-spurs-concern-2025-10-02/).

³ Department of Defense, *Secretary of War Pete Hegseth Addresses General and Flag Officers at Quantico, Virginia* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4318689/secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-addresses-general-and-flag-officers-at-quantico-v/).

⁴ Minority Staff, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, *Undermining the Watchdogs: The 19 Independent Inspectors General Fired by President Trump Uncovered Billions in Fraud, Waste, and Abuse* (May 2025) (online at www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/REPORT.pdf).

Process in Administrative Investigations.”⁵ The memo introduces major changes to intake processes and timelines, investigation standards, reporting requirements, and tracking systems, many of which are deeply concerning and threaten the integrity of the DOD OIG’s vital work.⁶

For instance, the memo imposes new hurdles to whistleblowers reporting complaints, with vague details and unreasonable, potentially unlawful deadlines. It directs the completion of a “credibility assessment” within seven duty days of receiving a complaint, though it does not specify who is responsible for conducting the assessment. This requirement conflicts with statutory requirements, including a five workday notification requirement for service branch IGs to report to the DOD OIG on allegations of misconduct against any senior official.⁷ It also conflicts with the DOD OIG’s requirements to complete its review of reprisal or restriction complaints within 60 days.⁸ Depending upon the nature of the allegations, the new seven-day deadline could impede or impair the conduct of a fair and thorough assessment, and the memo fails to provide assurances that any assessment still incomplete by that time would not automatically be ruled not credible. These conflicts place IGs and investigators in a difficult position and risk granting a free pass to fraud, waste, and abuse at the DOD, even after someone is brave enough to report it.

In addition, the memo imposes a new reporting structure that will create conditions for retaliation, witness tampering, and destruction of evidence. It directs the investigating agency to provide the subject of a complaint with written status updates every 14 days, including forthcoming steps. It is neither routine practice to report to the subject of an investigation of anticipated completion dates nor to report any forthcoming steps of such an investigation.⁹ It also conflicts with statutory requirements, particularly those applicable to military whistleblower reprisal cases, which already mandate notification to complainants and Congress if cases cannot be completed within 180 days.¹⁰

⁵ Department of Defense, *Memorandum for Secretaries of Military Departments, Subject: IG Oversight and Reform: Enhancing Timeliness, Transparency, and Due Process in Administrative Investigations* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2025/09/30/947d9ca3/ig-oversight-and-reform-enhancing-timeliness-transparency-and-due-process-in-administrative-investigations-osd010718-25-fod-fi.pdf>).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ 5 U.S. Code § 408; Department of Defense, *Directive: Investigations of Allegations Against Senior Officials* (June 6, 2023) (online at www.dodig.mil/Portals/48/DoDD%20550506%2004-28-2020.pdf); Department of Defense Inspector General, *Administrative Investigations Manual* (Sept. 23, 2022) (online at www.dodig.mil/Portals/48/Documents/Components/AI/AI%20Manuals/AI%20Manual%20ALL%20%20Final%2012-06-2024.pdf?ver=7C9hPE3QFXZ88G8fjmZ4KA%3D%3D).

⁸ Department of Defense, *DoD Instruction 7050.09 Uniform Standards for Evaluating and Investigating Military Reprisal or Restriction Complaints*, at p. 5 (Oct. 12, 2021) (online at www.dodig.mil/Portals/48/DoDI%207050_09%20New%2010-12-2021_1.pdf). A restriction complaint would involve a situation where a “subject said or did something that, if true, would have deterred a similarly situated Service member from lawfully communicating with a Member of Congress or an IG.” *Id.*, at p. 7.

⁹ See Department of Defense Inspector General, *Administrative Investigations Manual*, at p. 30-40 (Sept. 23, 2022) (online at www.dodig.mil/Portals/48/Documents/Components/AI/AI%20Manuals/AI%20Manual%20ALL%20%20Final%2012-06-2024.pdf?ver=7C9hPE3QFXZ88G8fjmZ4KA%3D%3D).

¹⁰ 10 U.S. Code § 1034(e)(3).

Further, the memo includes a section that prevents investigations into complaints filed after one year of the alleged event unless new compelling evidence is introduced. As the memo lacks a definition of “new compelling evidence” and an indication of who would determine what constitutes “new compelling evidence,” there is no assurance that this provision would not bar legitimate whistleblower reprisal claims that develop over time or where retaliation occurs long after the initial complaint was made.¹¹

The memo also allows promotions, assignments, and academic enrollment to continue unabated even if the person is the subject of an investigation. It states that investigations should generally not affect a service member’s career opportunities except in “limited circumstances.” However, the memo fails to identify or to define what may constitute “limited circumstances,” which could permit the directive to be applied inconsistently or to be used to circumvent the protection’s intended purpose. It is also unclear who within the Department would determine whether an exception to this rule would apply under “limited circumstances” and potentially interfere in the independent investigative process.¹²

Finally, the memo admonishes “frivolous” complaints, a term it fails to define, and appears to equate repeat or serial complaints with frivolous complaints, which risks chilling legitimate whistleblowing. The memo then closes with reference to prosecution under Article 107 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice—which prohibits making false statements—when detailing concerns over repeat complainants. We can all agree that intentionally making a false statement to an IG must not be tolerated, but the memo risks creating a chilling effect that may deter legitimate whistleblowers from coming forward due to fear of being accused of making false statements. To imply that repeat or “serial” complaints somehow constitute false statements to an IG is alarming and potentially harmful to DOD.¹³ Individuals who believe they have a reasonable allegation of wrongdoing have a right to come forward.

These concerns are compounded by a separate memorandum you issued on September 30, 2025, entitled, “Implementation of Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity Reform Plan,” which demonstrates your intent to eliminate anonymous whistleblower complaints. Anonymous complaints to IG offices are paramount to the oversight process.¹⁴ Prohibiting anonymous complaints reflects a general hostility to whistleblowers. This restriction on an IG could violate statutory protections for the right of military personnel to submit complaints to an IG or to Congress without restriction or direction from commanders.¹⁵

¹¹ Department of Defense, *Memorandum for Secretaries of Military Departments, Subject: IG Oversight and Reform: Enhancing Timeliness, Transparency, and Due Process in Administrative Investigations* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2025/09/30/947d9ca3/ig-oversight-and-reform-enhancing-timeliness-transparency-and-due-process-in-administrative-investigations-osd010718-25-fod-fi.pdf>).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Department of Defense, *Memorandum for Senior Pentagon Leadership et al., Subject: Implementation of Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity Reform Plan* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at <https://media.defense.gov/2025/Sep/30/2003812317/-1/-1/1/SECRETARY-OF-WAR-ANNOUNCED-MEMORANDUMS.PDF>).

¹⁵ 10 U.S. Code § 1034.

Taken together, your efforts to prohibit anonymous complaints, repeat complainants, and arbitrarily defined “frivolous” complaints threaten to shut down critical avenues for uncovering fraud, waste, and abuse.

Your pronounced overhaul of the DOD OIG processes advances an alarming pattern of eliminating basic, longstanding oversight and transparency safeguards meant to ensure that the DOD remains accountable to the American people. For example, you implemented new policies that “restrict journalists’ ability to keep the United States and the world informed of important national security issues,” including forcing them to pledge not to report information you have not approved.¹⁶ Additional reporting indicates that your department has directed military officials to sign non-disclosure agreements regarding its activities in Latin America, which could chill employees from disclosing violations of fraud, waste, and abuse to Congress.¹⁷

IGs must remain fiercely independent, effective, and accountable to the taxpayer in saving federal dollars, identifying misconduct, and holding malfeasant actors accountable. For IGs to be effective, whistleblowers must be protected. The DOD, Congress, and the American people rely on an IG’s steadfast pursuit of truth because, ultimately, it will make the DOD more capable of executing its mission.

To evaluate these concerning developments, we request that you provide the following information no later than December 12, 2025:¹⁸

1. Any statutory authorities relied on to direct actions related to the Secretary of Defense memorandum issued on September 30, 2025, titled “IG Oversight and Reform: Enhancing Timeliness, Transparency, and Due Process in Administrative Investigations” (September 2025 memo);
2. The offices with custody and control of the databases related to repeat complainants and individuals who file “frivolous complaints,” pursuant to the September 2025 memo;
3. The extent to which the September 2025 memo applies to any service branch IG;
4. All changes and plans to date that senior Pentagon officials have made pursuant to the September 2025 memo;
5. The definition of “credible evidence” as it relates to the September 2025 memo;

¹⁶ *Media Including Fox News Overwhelmingly Reject Pentagon Press Policy*, Washington Post (Oct. 15, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/10/14/fox-news-among-broadcasters-refusing-sign-pentagon-press-pledge/); *Pro-Trump Outlets Flock to the Pentagon Under New Media Policy*, Politico (Oct. 22, 2025) (online at www.politico.com/news/2025/10/22/pentagon-trump-press-corps-00619002).

¹⁷ *Exclusive: U.S. Military Officials Required to Sign NDAs Tied to Latin America Mission, Sources Say*, Reuters (Oct. 28, 2025) (online at www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-military-officials-required-sign-ndas-tied-latin-america-mission-sources-say-2025-10-28/); Pub. L. No. 118-47 (2024).

¹⁸ Pub L. No. 95-452 (1978).

6. The definition of “frivolous” as it relates to the September 2025 memo;
7. The definition of “new compelling evidence” as it relates to the September 2025 memo;
8. The individual or office within the DOD or OIG that would determine the applicability of “new compelling evidence” pursuant to the September 2025 memo;
9. Any disciplinary actions that may be pursued against individuals flagged as making “frivolous” or “repeat” complaints, as relates to the September 2025 memo;
10. The status of anonymous complaints open at the time of issuance of the September 2025 memo;
11. The definition of “limited circumstances,” pursuant to the “Transparency and Predictability” section of the September 2025 memo;
12. The individual or office within the Department that would determine the applicability of “limited circumstances,” pursuant to the “Transparency and Predictability” section of the September 2025 memo;¹⁹ and
13. Any statutory authorities relied on to direct actions related to the Secretary of Defense memorandum issued on September 30, 2025, titled “Implementation of Military Equal Employment Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity Reform Plan.”²⁰

We also request that you provide the following documents and information no later than December 12, 2025:

1. All documents and communications referring or relating to the September 2025 memo;
2. All documents referring to or concerning changes in departmental or service branch policies, procedures, or practices relating to whistleblower and inspector general complaints from January 20, 2025, to the present, including but not

¹⁹ Department of Defense, *Memorandum for Secretaries of Military Departments, Subject: IG Oversight and Reform: Enhancing Timeliness, Transparency, and Due Process in Administrative Investigations* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2025/09/30/947d9ca3/ig-oversight-and-reform-enhancing-timeliness-transparency-and-due-process-in-administrative-investigations-osd010718-25-fod-fi.pdf>).

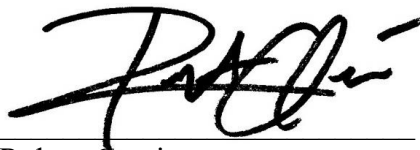
²⁰ Department of Defense, *Memorandum for Senior Pentagon Leadership et al., Subject: Implementation of Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity Reform Plan* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at <https://media.defense.gov/2025/Sep/30/2003812317/-1/-1/1/SECRETARY-OF-WAR-ANNOUNCED-MEMORANDUMS.PDF>).

limited to all documents referring or relating to any departmental or service branch actions at any level following issuance of the September 2025 memo and all memoranda covering potential or actual impacts to the Department or the military service branches and service branch IGs upon investigation integrity, whistleblower confidentiality, or willingness of potential whistleblowers to come forward;²¹ and

3. All documents and communications since January 20, 2025, including any nondisclosure or confidentiality agreements, forms, policies, instructions, or agreements, that purport to limit the ability of current or former federal employees to communicate with Congress, inspectors general, or the Office of Special Counsel, whether explicitly or as part of a general restriction on communications.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Oversight and Government Reform Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051 and Armed Services Committee Democratic Staff at (202) 225-4151. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Armed Services Committee

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

The Honorable Mike Rogers, Chairman
Armed Services Committee

Mr. Steven Stebbins, Acting Inspector General
Department of Defense Office of Inspector General

²¹ Department of Defense, *Memorandum for Secretaries of Military Departments, Subject: IG Oversight and Reform: Enhancing Timeliness, Transparency, and Due Process in Administrative Investigations* (Sept. 30, 2025) (online at <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2025/09/30/947d9ca3/ig-oversight-and-reform-enhancing-timeliness-transparency-and-due-process-in-administrative-investigations-osd010718-25-fod-fi.pdf>).