

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 28, 2022

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Rear Admiral Nancy S. Lacore
Commandant, Naval District Washington
720 Kennon Street SE
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374

We write to express our deep concern for the unacceptable working conditions at the firehouse located at Naval Support Activity Bethesda, home of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and request the completion of the Navy's plan for a new firehouse with the utmost speed and diligence.

In March 2019, Senator Van Hollen wrote to then-Commandant RADM Carl Lahti to express serious concern for the health and safety of the firefighters working at NSA Bethesda. As you likely know, the living and working conditions at the NSA Bethesda firehouse have been unacceptable for years, plagued by mold, asbestos, roof leaks, electrical issues, and structural instability even before a 2019 fire rendered half of the facility uninhabitable. On February 17, 2022, Senators Van Hollen and Cardin and Congressman Raskin wrote to Secretary Del Toro regarding the conditions at NSA Bethesda's Comfort Hall and Sanctuary Hall and expressed concern that, viewed alongside the persistent problems at the firehouse, the neglect of facilities at this installation appear to be more than an isolated problem.

While some steps appear to have been taken to mitigate issues we highlighted in the past at the barracks, the firehouse remains in critical condition. Just two weeks ago, a firefighter at the Walter Reed firehouse partially fell through the floor of the building and was sent to the emergency room to receive treatment. It is shameful and unacceptable that conditions at NSA Bethesda facilities remain in this state, and further underscores the clear and urgent need for the Navy's immediate action on construction plans for a new firehouse.

While we understand that military installations often operate under budgetary constraints and with competing priorities, unsafe working conditions and the inability to respond effectively to fires on an installation pose immediate threats to military readiness. As such, the working conditions at the NSA Bethesda firehouse must be a priority. Yet, to date, despite Congressional staff visits, Congressional requests that this facility be prioritized for replacement, and report language accompanying the FY 2020 Military Construction-VA appropriations bill directing the Navy to prioritize fire and emergency services facilities, a permanent solution has still not been identified and the Navy has not prioritized the construction of a new fire station in its budget submissions to Congress.

In a February 2021 information paper provided to Senator Van Hollen's office, the Navy wrote that "[p]lanning is underway for a new Joint Navy/Defense Health Agency Fire Station at NSA Bethesda, and that project will be evaluated for funding in future budget cycles against all other

military construction needs.” However, we have received no further communication regarding the progress of these plans. Therefore, we ask that no later than July 5th you respond in writing with an estimate of when planning will be completed for the new fire station.

We owe it to the men and women entrusted to the care of this installation that NSA Bethesda and Walter Reed are home to world-class facilities and management. We appreciate your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



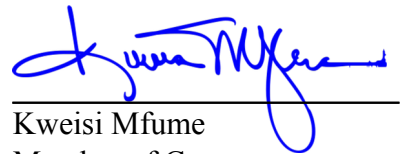
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



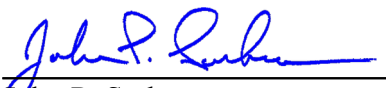
Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



David J. Trone
Member of Congress