

June 30, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

I am writing to you to raise alarm about recent military training and public airshow accidents that have resulted in the death of at least ten servicemembers, including eight servicemembers who were recently killed in a B-52 bomber crash.¹ Those who volunteer to serve in uniform understand that military service is inherently dangerous, but the Department has a responsibility to do everything in its power to safeguard our servicemembers. These crashes, which occurred in non-combat environments, seem to show a lack of precautions to ensure the safety of our servicemembers and protect our military readiness. I urge you to launch an immediate Department-wide readiness review, including an analysis of training, sustainment, funding, logistics, and operational tempo, and provide such a review to the Appropriations Committees as soon as possible.

Despite significant advances in aircraft technology, Pentagon data indicates that military aviation mishaps are increasing.² Between 2019 and 2024, there were a total of 4,820 military aircraft mishaps, including 222 "Class A" incidents. In a similar time frame, between 2020 and 2024, 90 servicemembers died in U.S. military aviation mishaps. In recent years, there have been an alarming number of crashes in the Pacific Northwest. In October 2024, two EA-18G Growler pilots were killed in a training accident in a remote area near Mount Ranier, shortly after returning from an extended deployment to the Middle East. In May 2026, two EA-18G Growlers from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island collided while they were executing a close formation pass during a live air show demonstration in Idaho, destroying both jets.³ While all four

¹ Shawn Hubler, Jill Cowan, and John Ismay, "B-52 Crash at Edwards Air Force Base in California," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/15/us/b-52-crash-edwards-air-force-base-california.html>.

² Thomas Novelty, "Military Aircraft Crashes Skyrocketed From 2020 to 2024, New Data Shows," *Defense One*, November 19, 2025, <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2025/11/military-aircraft-crashes-skyrocketed-2020-2024-new-data-shows/409649/>.

³ KOMO News Staff, "EA-18G Growler Jet Involved in Midair Collision at Idaho Air Show," *KOMO News*, May 18, 2026, <https://komonews.com/news/local/ea18g-growler-jet-aircraft-us-navy-defense-army-military-marines-armed-forces-war-boeing-super-hornet-blue-angels-prowler-whidbey-island>.

servicemembers ejected safely, one airman was hospitalized.⁴ Finally, this month, an F/A-18 Hornet aircraft crashed near Rimrock Lake in Washington state during a routine training exercise. Thankfully the pilot ejected safely, but the aircraft was destroyed and the crash sparked a wildfire in the area.⁵

U.S. Naval Air Force recently issued a safety stand down for the four tactical aviation teams in response to the recent EA-18G Growler air show crashes.⁶ I hope this is only an initial step. There is a clear need to look deeper into the now three recent accidents involving military aircraft during non-combat flight operations.

As Vice Chair of the Appropriations Committee, I have provided more than \$800 million over the last three fiscal years to increase military readiness across multiple services and multiple platforms. I have ensured that the Department executed these funds quickly to increase aircraft readiness and accelerate safety-related upgrades. The host of incidents during this time make it clear that there are fundamental issues that need to be addressed.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this incredibly important matter. I look forward to your response and future improvements made to military equipment, training, and/or procedures to further minimize the risk for our brave servicemembers.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator

⁴ Rebecca Boone & Matthew Brown, “What to Know About a Midair Collision Between 2 Navy Jets at an Idaho Air Show,” *PBS NewsHour*, May 18, 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/what-to-know-about-a-midair-collision-between-2-navy-jets-at-an-idaho-air-show>.

⁵ Nick Wagner, Catalina Gaitán, and Paige Cornwell, “Military Aircraft Crashes Near Mount Rainier, Sparking Wildfire,” *The Seattle Times*, June 14, 2026, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/military-aircraft-crashes-near-mount-rainier-sparking-wildfire/>.

⁶ Heather Mongilio, “Air Boss Orders Flight Demo Team Safety Stand Down Following Growler Crash,” *U.S. Naval Institute News*, May 21, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/05/21/air-boss-orders-flight-demo-team-safety-stand-down-following-growler-crash>.