

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 29, 2026

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Williams Brown,

Ensuring the health and well-being of our nation's military service members is one of our most fundamental responsibilities, particularly when they are deployed overseas and serving far from their loved ones. Deployments can have a significant impact on service members' health and safety, including their mental health. Given the importance of ensuring service members have the resources they need to access mental health resources, we write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct an independent review into the mental health resources that service members have access to when deployed and an assessment of if such resources are sufficient.

In June 2025, the USS Gerald R. Ford began a deployment that was extended several times, ultimately keeping sailors deployed for 326 days. During the deployment, a fire that began in a laundry room spread to sleeping quarters, displacing approximately 600 sailors, some of whom were forced to sleep on floors and tables. The carrier also experienced plumbing and sewage system issues. Sailors aboard aircraft carriers already work long and demanding shifts under difficult conditions. At a minimum, they deserve safe and adequate places to sleep, access to basic necessities, and living conditions that protect their physical and mental health. Extended deployments place enormous strain on servicemembers and their families. When those deployments are compounded by inadequate living conditions, Congress has a responsibility to understand the impact on morale, mental health, readiness, and retention, and ensure the Department of Defense (DOD) is doing everything possible to support the service members we ask to serve.

In August 2026, it was publicly reported that several sailors attempted to jump overboard the USS Lincoln due to the carrier being deployed for a lengthy 286 days. In September 2026, the Acting U.S. Secretary of the Navy also shared that approximately eight sailors attempted suicide during the deployment. In addition, service members did not have access to sufficient food and supplies, and it is unclear what specific mental health resources service members can access when deployed. These incidents and insufficient conditions raise serious concerns and questions about the identification and treatment of deployed service members suffering from mental health issues, particularly if such conditions become serious.

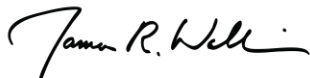
DOD requires the military departments to conduct a series of health screenings of service members that include an assessment of their mental health before, during, and after deployments. The type of care—including mental health care—that can be provided during deployment depends upon the available clinical capabilities and resources of that operational setting. In these settings, the accessibility of resources to identify and treat service members with mental health concerns is critical in managing their wellness and mitigating potential escalation. This is especially important for operational settings such as Navy aircraft carriers and submarines in which the confined environment and isolation can be mentally stressful.

Therefore, we request that GAO conduct an independent review focused on the following areas:

1. What are the DOD and Navy policies, procedures, and expectations for providing accessible mental health resources for identifying and treating service members in operational settings?
2. How does the Navy ensure that its service members obtain required screenings before, during, and after deployments? How does the Navy use the results of mental health screenings in making deployment decisions?
3. What factors contribute to service members' mental health issues in operational settings?
4. How does the Navy ensure adequate access to mental health treatment in operational settings? How does the Navy manage escalation of symptoms, including suicide attempts, in these settings?
5. What are the Navy's biggest challenges to delivering mental health care in operational settings, and how is it addressing these challenges?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Congressman Walkinshaw's office at (202) 225-1492.

Sincerely,



James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress



Suhas Subramanyam
Ranking Member
Military and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
House Oversight and Government Reform