

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 5, 2020

Ryan D. McCarthy
Secretary of the Army
Department of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

Dear Secretary McCarthy:

I write to you today because I am concerned that certain uniform policies at the United States Military Academy at West Point appear to disproportionately impact female cadets, forcing them to wear ill-fitting uniforms and pay more out of pocket for uniforms. While on its face, the uniform policy may appear to be gender-neutral policy, it does not appear to be so in effect. As the Academy celebrates 40 years since its first female cadets graduated, it is past time to ensure that female cadets have equal access to uniforms that fit.

The United States Military Academy issues a full set of gear to all incoming cadets. That gear includes five sets of unisex Army Combat Uniforms (ACUs), which are traditionally the day-to-day uniforms of all soldiers in the United States Army. According to Department of the Army Pamphlet 670-1, paragraph 4-5(n), there is an alternate uniform called the Army Combat Uniform – Female, or ACU–Female, which is intended to accommodate additional body types with a wider range of sizes.

Any cadet wishing to wear the ACU–Female must purchase it on their own. However, cadets do not even have access to the Post Exchange that sells the ACU–Female uniforms until after they have completed their initial six-week Cadet Basic Training. They must wear the original-issued uniform throughout those first six weeks, even if it does not properly fit. These cadets are thereby forced to wear uniforms that do not match the expected standards for uniform appearance. It also means they cannot return ill-fitting uniforms because only new, unused garments can be turned in, and only within ten days from when they were issued. Finally, it means they need to spend almost \$100 per uniform set, or \$500 to replace all five issued sets, when their counterparts do not have to spend a dime.

While I understand the Army does not officially distinguish between male and female uniforms, women are more affected by this policy than men because the ACU–Female provides smaller sizes more tailored to the bodies of many women. The disproportional impact of this policy on female cadets may unintentionally send a message to female cadets that they are second-class citizens. The appearance of uniforms is of great importance to a military institution that prides

itself on following high standards of personal appearance. Incoming cadets may encounter stigma or lose confidence from being forced to wear ill-fitting uniforms.

The Academy's failure to offer the ACU-Female to incoming cadets, when the uniform exists and is authorized for wear, is concerning. Please provide answers to the following questions by October 30:

1. Why is the ACU-Female not available as an option for incoming cadets receiving their initial issue of clothing?
2. Can newly enlisted soldiers be issued the ACU-Female for their initial issue of clothing? If so, why does this policy not also apply to incoming cadets at the Academy?
3. What resources or obstacles have prevented the Academy from offering the ACU-Female to its incoming cadets? Is there anything Congress can do to facilitate a change in policy?
4. Will you commit to changing the policy at the Academy to ensure that all soldiers, regardless of gender, are issued the uniform that best fits their body type, even if that uniform is the ACU-Female?

I appreciate the important role you and the U.S. Military Academy play in molding the Army's future military leaders. It is clear that we must do more to fully support the young women and men pursuing a career in the military. I look forward to working closely with you and the Academy toward this end.

With every good wish,



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator