

## United States Senate

April 20, 2023

Captain Felix. A. Bigby  
Interim Director, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center  
8901 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20889

Dear Captain Bigby,

I am writing to express my concern over Walter Reed National Military Medical Center's failure to renew its contract with the Holy Name College Friary, a group of Franciscans dedicated to Catholic pastoral care. This abrupt termination of a two-decade old contract in the form of a "cease and desist" order sent to Holy Name College Friary on March 31, 2023 has resulted in the absence of adequate pastoral care for service members, veterans, and their families during Holy Week.

It is difficult to understand why a secular defense contracting firm was awarded a contract that they cannot possibly fulfill, when a longstanding and experienced religious organization like the Franciscans could simply have had their contract renewed. Such decision to award the contract to the lowest bidder without considering their obvious lack of qualification to provide essential Catholic services (such as the administering of last rites to the aging/dying) was shortsighted and remains untenable going forwards. Furthermore, I find the timing of this, prior to the holiest week of the Catholic liturgical calendar, even more troubling.

Such failure to provide adequate Catholic pastoral care violates the First Amendment guarantee of free exercise of religion to all citizens, and it also causes irreparable harm to the hospitalized servicemen and women, whose religious rights the medical center has a constitutional duty to provide for and protect. For all the forgoing reasons, I urge you to reinstate the Franciscans' ministry at Walter Reed as soon as possible. Additionally, I ask for your response to the following questions by May 8, 2023:

- 1) Whose decision was it to terminate the contract with Holy Name College Friary?
- 2) For what specific reason was a new organization contracted instead of the Holy Name College Friary?
- 3) Why was this contract allowed to lapse immediately before Holy Week?
- 4) In deciding not to renew the contract with Holy Name College Friary, was any consideration given to the liturgical calendar whatsoever? If not, why not?

- 5) Ms. Elizabeth A. Tomlin, Esq., General Counsel of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA (AMS), reached out to the contracting officers at Walter Reed numerous times throughout Holy Week asking for the Franciscans' Catholic ministry to be reinstated at least through Easter. As of April 7th, at least seven days after the contract was terminated, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center had not responded to any of these requests from the Archdiocese. Why did Walter Reed fail to respond to any of Ms. Tomlin's several requests?
- 6) Does the secular defense contractor to whom you awarded the contract have anyone on its staff that is able to administer the sacraments of the Catholic faith, including last rites?
- 7) Please provide a copy of all complaints made by those in the care and custody of Walter Reed regarding the unavailability or inadequacy of religious care since the lapsing of the contract with Holy Name College Friary.
- 8) What specific actions are you going to take to ensure that the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center is not a hostile environment to the free exercise of religion?

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



Senator Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on the Constitution  
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary