

October 2, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

FROM: Lt Col (Ret) Ryan Sweazey, Walk the Talk Foundation
LTC (Ret) Francesca Graham, Walk the Talk Foundation

SUBJECT: Secretary Hegseth's "No More Walking on Eggshells Policy" – The Good, The Bad, and the Nonexistent

1. On September 30, 2025, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth addressed the leadership corps of the U.S. Military, announcing reform measures the Department is to undertake to improve readiness and further the organization's "warrior ethos." In parallel, Hegseth released [several memoranda](#) outlining reform policies.
2. Approximately thirty minutes into the September 30 speech, SECWAR re-introduced his "No More Walking on Eggshells Policy," something he had initially announced in an [April 2025 press release](#). The overarching intent of the Secretary's orders is to bring about substantive reform in the Military Equal Opportunity (MEO), Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), and Inspector General (IG) systems. These so-called "independent" avenues of redress were established – at least in theory – so that service members and federal civilians could report misconduct with legal protections from reprisal / retaliation, also known as "whistleblower" protections, as defined in 10 U.S. Code § 1034 and 5 U.S. Code § 2302.

3. The Good: The Call for Reform

There are many aspects of the SECWAR's new policy memoranda we at [Walk the Talk Foundation](#) agree with, specifically that these avenues of redress are broken and are in dire need of repair. We agree that investigations need to be done in a timely manner and with as much transparency as possible. We agree that investigators should receive training tailored to understanding the tradecraft of investigations. But there are many aspects of the Secretary's new policies which are cause for concern, specifically:

4. The Bad: The Cognitive Bias from Which the Policies Were Created

Both in his April 2025 announcement as well as his speech on September 30, 2025, Hegseth made more-than-vague allusions to the following pattern of what he apparently believes is the typical IG and M/EEO complaint:

Underperforming complainants file retaliatory complaints against commanders and/or leaders who are simply trying to hold those members to the standards of the profession. The subsequent complaint "derails" those leaders' careers, the complaining "ideologue" having successfully weaponized the IG and M/EEO systems to their advantage.

As proof of this bias, one should listen to how Hegseth introduced the policy changes:

“Truth be told – for the most part, we don’t need new standards, **we just need to reestablish a culture where enforcing standards is possible. And that’s why** today at my direction, **I’m issuing new policies that will overhaul the IG, EEO, and MEO processes.”**

The message from the Secretary was clear – previous IG and M/EEO policies were: 1) prohibiting leaders from enforcing the standards, and 2) empowering those who did not meet the standards to “derail” leaders who tried to hold them to the standards.

While these types of complaints surely exist, they do not make up the vast majority of IG or M/EEO complaints. Taken from our Foundation’s [Advisors’](#) experience as former Inspectors General, our own direct involvement, and the insight gained from advising more than 460 current and former service members and federal civilians, we can state with absolute clarity that the so-called “weaponization” of the IG and M/EEO system, as described by the Secretary, is a gross exaggeration. His claims are not only unsupported by fact but amount to little more than fear-mongering designed to discredit legitimate complaints and silence those who seek accountability.

5. In Contrast, the *Actual* Reality...

Here, taken from a collective decades’ worth of IG and M/EEO experience within the Foundation, plus 460+ cases worked, is the *actual* pattern of a typical IG or M/EEO complaint:

The complainant is not a whiner, nor a poor performer.

They are highly performing seasoned officers / enlisted members or federal civilians with 10+ years of service and a spotless record.

They do not file a complaint after being “held to standards” by a leader.

They witness and/or are victims of a violation of military or federal service regulations and/or the law.

They do not “derail” their leadership – in reality, the opposite occurs.

After the member attempts to address an issue through the chain of command, the institution retaliates against the complainant by isolating, gaslighting, and defaming them, thereby derailing *their* career.

After the complainant is summarily crushed, those with the fortitude – though many do not – **attempt to seek redress through the IG or M/EEO**, both of which operate under the leadership of the very organization that carried out the wrongdoing and/or allowed it to occur.

After a months-long – and sometimes years-long – investigation, **the vast majority of complaints against institutional leaders are not substantiated**, resulting not only in a lack of

redress or justice, but also in a service member or federal civilian who is professionally, personally, and many times emotionally ruined.

6. The More Bad: Policy Execution

“As permitted by law, apply uniform, legally sound **thresholds to ensure formal investigations are initiated only when clearly warranted**. The seven duty day credibility assessment must remain distinct from the investigation to prevent unnecessary delays, personnel holds, or premature external notifications. An investigation should be initiated only if the complaint meets credible-evidence standard.”

The SECWAR’s intent, taken from the above quoted policy memo, is clear: **shift the burden of scrutiny onto the complainant**. At first glance, this may sound reasonable, until one considers the reality of how these systems already function:

Across the Department, substantiation rates for complaints of all kinds – reprisal, discrimination, harassment, hostile work environment, and abuse of authority – are vanishingly low. For example, **reprisal complaints alone are substantiated at only 1.7% (34 of 2,037 cases)**. That figure does not even account for the countless cases dismissed outright without ever reaching investigation. This means that nearly **99% of Reprisal and Retaliation complaints** throughout the entire Department of Defense go **unsubstantiated**. Based on our data, that pattern holds across M/EEO complaints as well.

So, with success rates already near zero, why is the priority to ratchet up *even more* scrutiny of the complainant? This policy does not meaningfully filter out “frivolous” complaints – it reinforces the institutional reflex to protect leadership while discrediting those who report misconduct, whether the allegation involves reprisal, harassment, discrimination, or abuse of authority.

Further, the question is begged: **Who will be performing this initial complaint screening?** The answer: the IG and M/EEO system – again, the same IGs and M/EEO who remain subordinate to the institutional leaders whose organizations are accused of wrongdoing (for more on this conflict, see the “Nonexistent” section below).

7. The Unspoken Intent: Furthering the Stigma of Reporting Misconduct

If there were ever a case study in creating a chilling effect, the SECWAR’s statement is it:

“We are overhauling an Inspector General process, the IG, that has been weaponized. **Putting complainers, ideologues, and poor performers in the driver’s seat**. We’re doing the same with the Equal Opportunity and Military Equal Opportunity policies, the EO and MEO, at our Department.”

The message is unmistakable: under Secretary Hegseth’s watch, reporting misconduct will no longer be seen as a lawful duty or a protected right – it will be branded as disloyalty. In plain

terms, his words signal **open season on whistleblowers, victims, and anyone who dares to file a complaint.**

8. The Nonexistent: Training, Independence, and Perhaps Most of All: Hope

Two crucial issues afflicting the IG and M/EEO systems, whether for those reporting misconduct or those under investigation, were conspicuously absent from the Secretary's plan: **training and independence for IGs & M/EEOs.** Instead, his reforms focus on filtering complainants, trimming timelines, and improving data dashboards, while leaving untouched the structural deficiencies that actually erode trust.

Today, the IG and M/EEO systems are staffed largely by underqualified and undertrained amateurs. That is not to disparage them or their qualities as people, service members, or federal civilians; rather, it reflects the reality that they are being tasked with responsibilities for which they are simply not prepared. Specifically:

An officer who is appointed to be **an Inspector General** in the Armed Services **receives, on average, a measly four business days of training** before being accredited as an IG.

An Investigating Officer (IO) conducting a unit-level investigation receives **no investigatory training at all.**

A service member or federal civilian can suffer severe personal and professional harm both when filing a complaint **and** when becoming the subject of one that is poorly vetted or mishandled – sometimes resulting in **dismissal from the Department despite ultimate non-substantiation.**

The premise here is simple: if the Secretary wants professional investigations, i.e. ones that cannot be “weaponized” in *any* direction, they must be conducted by trained professionals. One would not trust a lawyer with four days of training to represent them in court and hold their life and career in their hands. And in that same vein, why would anyone trust an IG or M/EEO investigator, or a unit-level investigator, with zero to four days of training to carry out an investigation with potentially career-ending ramifications?

9. On the Subject of Independence...

Throughout the Armed Services, **there exists a glaring conflict of interest:** so-called “independent” IGs and M/EEOs are subordinate to the institutional leadership of the organizations they are tasked to investigate. Army Regulation 20-1 makes this explicit: “IGs work only for their commanders.” That structural dependence ensures that even when misconduct is reported in good faith, outcomes will always be filtered through the perceived interests of the command. Yet nowhere in the Secretary's reforms is this conflict even acknowledged. His priority is not fixing the lack of independence, it's tightening the screws on members who report misconduct. The result is predictable: the IG and M/EEO systems will

continue to be manipulated at will by Departmental leaders, while an apathetic CIGIE and Congress spectate.

10. And Finally, The Real Toll: Our People, Our Readiness

29% of active-duty suicides in Calendar Year (CY) 2023 involved members undergoing a legal or administrative investigation. (Most recent report.)

90+% of Walk the Talk Foundation clients suffer some degree of mental health trauma and/or moral injury.

Several clients of our Foundation have had suicidal ideations, some have attempted suicide, some of those have attempted suicide multiple times.

Of those above-listed members, none were under-performing, none were being “held to a standard” when they began their IG or M/EEO “journey,” and none were ideologues...well, save for the fact that they believed the ideology the Department of Defense sold them: that they would be by-law protected when they reported misconduct. In the end, that ideology proved to be nothing more than a golden calf.

And this is perhaps the most salient point and the one we must be zero in on: **the unequivocal failure of the IG and M/EEO systems cost careers and cost lives. Period.** Not because leaders were wrongly “derailed” by frivolous complaints, as the Secretary suggests, but because the very design of these systems is arduous, glacial, opaque, conflicted, and corrupted, thereby leaving both complainants and subjects trapped in Star Chambers where due process, transparency, and independence are absent. These are the systemic flaws and structural considerations the Secretary’s September 30, 2025, speech and memos leave untouched.

The Secretary has chosen to shield the perception of the institution rather than strengthen the institution itself. By attacking those who report misconduct, he strips the force of the very truth-tellers who make readiness real, suppressing rights and due process in the name of good order and discipline and “warrior ethos.” History is unambiguous: the militaries that silenced their whistleblowers were the ones that marched into battle ill-prepared and ill-equipped. The fates of those militaries were equally unambiguous.

In service to those who serve honorably – and to the Nation they defend,



RYAN SWEAZEY
President and Founder
Walk the Talk Foundation



FRANCESCA GRAHAM
Chief Operating Officer
Walk the Talk Foundation