

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 1, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Noem:

We write regarding the recent conduct by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) towards the disabled Purple Heart veteran Sae Joon Park. On June 23rd, due to your department's threats to detain him unless he self-deports, Mr. Park left the United States after living here for nearly 50 years. While DHS press releases frequently claim that this administration is going after "the worst of the worst," your department's actions towards this veteran say otherwise. As members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, we ask why your department chose to treat someone who has fought for our country in this way.

Mr. Park has been living in the United States since the age of seven. He enlisted in the U.S. Army after graduating from high school, and was deployed to Panama to assist in the 1989 Operation Just Cause military action. During his time in Panama, he was shot in the back by Panamanian soldiers and flown back to the United States. After receiving an honorable discharge and a Purple Heart, he battled undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which led to a drug addiction and a criminal conviction for jumping bail. His green card was revoked due to this criminal conviction, but immigration officials allowed Mr. Park to remain in the United States so long as he checked in yearly with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

During his most recent check-in in June, ICE officials told Mr. Park that he would be detained unless he self-deported. To avoid this, Mr. Park left the United States on June 23rd. He leaves behind two children and an ailing mother, who is in the beginning stages of dementia.

When given the opportunity to comment on this story, Assistant Homeland Security Secretary Tricia McLaughlin chose to repeat your department's standard talking points about going after noncitizens who break the law. This callous statement ignores the struggles that many veterans face after their service; approximately 11% of veterans' first visit to a Veterans Affairs medical clinic is related to substance use disorder.

To aid in our oversight on the Veterans Affairs Committee, we ask that you respond to the following questions no later than August 20th:

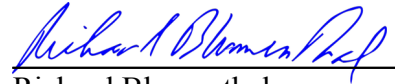
1. What policy or objective do you believe was furthered by your department's decision to deny Mr. Park continuing relief?
2. What considerations were made by your staff, if any, of potential mitigating circumstances in the case of Mr. Park?
3. How many deportations or self-deportations of veterans have occurred under your tenure, and how many deportations or self-deportations of veterans have involved those with documented PTSD or substance use disorder?
4. What guidance have you provided to your employees, if any, on handling cases involving veterans, individuals with past substance use disorder, and individuals with past PTSD?
5. What changes have you made to the criteria or guidance provided to your employees, if any, on extending deferred action or supervised release?

Immigrants like Mr. Park do not represent a threat to our country, and your treatment of Mr. Park has not made our country safer. Your department must explain to the American people your reasoning for treating a veteran, who has fought and been wounded for our country, in such a poor manner. If you have any questions, please reach out to my staff.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator