

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 12, 2021

The Honorable Kate Brown  
Governor  
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254  
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Oregon Military Department  
Attn: Major General Michael E. Stencel  
1776 Military Way SE  
PO Box 14350  
Salem, OR 97309-5047

Governor Brown and Major General Stencel:

We write to inform you of disturbing reports we've received from multiple Oregon National Guard (ORNG) members during their recent deployment to Oregon hospitals and other health care sites to assist with our state's COVID-19 response. The reports allege mismanagement, lack of organization, delay of benefits and pay, and failure to pay what ORNG members are owed. Such treatment of our service members should be unacceptable.

On August 13, 2021, you announced that up to 1,500 Oregon National Guard Members would be deployed across Oregon to assist with the state's surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations.

We call your attention to the following reports we've received from ORNG members regarding this deployment:

- During this deployment, ORNG Members have reported that the State purposely allowed initial orders to lapse and then issued new orders, instead of extending current orders. This has resulted in ORNG members not qualifying for benefit increases and pay they would normally qualify for after 30 days of consecutive service, including the basic housing allowance (BHA), TRICARE, and more.
- Once ORNG members were activated and had completed normal administrative tasks prior to deployment, the State was unprepared to quickly place them in areas of need. ORNG members received contradictory information about where they would serve, waiting and wasting days of their deployment. It appears the State preemptively activated ORNG members before determining the logistics of deployment and the needs of respective hospitals.
- While some ORNG members were able to wait out the State's delay at home, others were forced to reserve hotels or find other accommodation with their own money – which some could not afford – with the promise they would be reimbursed in the future.
- As late as mid-September, some ORNG members had not yet been deployed or received pay. They were in limbo, away from their families, forced to arrange for childcare and other needs in their absence, and unable to work their civilian jobs.
- ORNG Members have also shared that their travel vouchers have not been recognized, resulting in Members having to pay out of their own pocket for travel related to their orders.
- ORNG members have informed us about a lack of mental health resources to cope with the acute challenges they face while assisting COVID-19 patients who are gravely ill or dying.

These reports indicate a concerning pattern about the management of this recent ORNG deployment. ORNG members have also reported similar concerns about previous deployments.

ORNG Members are fellow Oregonians who give their time and sacrifice to serve our communities in times of need. Many ORNG Members have full-time jobs, families, and other responsibilities that they willingly pause in order to serve their fellow Oregonians. ORNG Members' heroic efforts are bolstering hospitals and helping our communities and loved ones during a deadly pandemic. ORNG members deserve effective and efficient leadership, support, and management, and they deserve to receive the full pay and benefits they have earned.

Given the multiple reports our offices have received, it is clear these issues are systemic and cannot be addressed case-by-case. We expect a detailed response from the State addressing all of these issues, and we call on you to immediately rectify any and all of these troubling accounts.

We look forward to your response. Thank you for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,



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Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



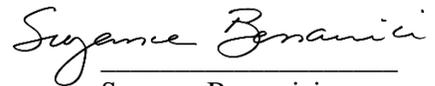
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Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



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Kurt Schrader  
Member of Congress



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Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress