

Testimony of Jana Wanner

Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing.

My name is Jana Wanner. I am the proud spouse of my husband, who is in the Army, and we have been married for 12 years. My husband is a Sergeant First Class, and he has been in the Army for 15 years. We have 2 children, one with special needs, who is enrolled in the Department's Exceptional Family Member Program.

Like most military families, our family has moved often. We are currently at our 5th duty station, but at Ft. Gordon for a second time. During our first tour at Ft. Gordon in 2013, we arrived from Germany and did not have enough time to look for off post housing. After waiting in a hotel for over 2 weeks, we were offered a home that had an active leak from the refrigerator, cigarette butts scattered on the stairs, as well as dirt and roaches on the kitchen floor. When questioned about the condition of the home, the Balfour staff member stated that roaches are "normal" in Georgia, and that the contractors must have "accidentally" left their used cigarettes behind. Over the next few months, we had frequent work orders to include leaks, mold issues, an air conditioner that did not work properly, and at one point was declared a fire hazard. After 5 months living in these conditions, we moved to a home outside of the installation.

I began my advocacy 4 years ago while stationed in Maryland. After our own experiences as a family with lack of appropriate accommodations for our daughter, and mold

issues in our home, I decided to speak out about the conditions military families are living in. After returning to Ft. Gordon for the 2nd time in 2019, I started hearing from military families living on the installation with various housing concerns. Myself, Hannya Webster, and Chrissy Dykes, created a private Facebook group that is specifically for Ft. Gordon families with housing issues. On average, each month, we help dozens of families with the ongoing problems with Balfour's mismanagement of the homes on the installation. Lack of prompt response to repairs such as leaks, and mold, as well as lack of transparency about the waitlist for on post housing, sewage leaks, or pest issues are things we hear about frequently from families.

Work orders for maintenance requests go unaddressed or ignored for months at a time in some cases. More specifically, one resident has had work orders open since December 2021, requesting repairs to their master bedroom ceiling with water damage. The ceiling appears to be caving in from the damage, but maintenance has not addressed their concerns since putting the work orders in. Several other residents have reported similar experiences with leaks causing water damage, with limited communication from maintenance about repairs, and work orders have been left open with no timeline given for repairs.

When residents have requested a move-in checklist to document pre-existing damages, housing staff has stated there is no official form to document the damages. Residents are then told to send an email to the housing office with photos and descriptions of the damages, and these will be kept on file. However, after several residents reached out to confirm their emails were on file to prepare for a move out inspection, they were told their documentation was never received.

ADA accommodations requests, or other reasonable accommodations requests, have been ignored or denied. There are currently no standard proof requirements for accommodation

needs. Balfour is inconsistent with the information they request to prove the need for reasonable accommodations. Some families have made reasonable requests for accommodation and were promised one level homes, only to arrive to find out the home they were offered was not a one level home. Other families have requested ADA homes due to the medical need, only to be placed on a several months long waitlist due to Balfour not leaving the homes available for need based families.

The fear of retaliation by Balfour, and a lack of clarity on how to report, are common reasons that have prevented families from reporting their issues. Residents have frequently discussed what is sometimes described as verbally abusive staff that deter them from speaking up any further. For families that have never lived in military housing before, the process to dispute is even more confusing and unclear.

The Tenant Bill of Rights and the dispute process were well intentioned. But more oversight is still needed, such as more thorough inspections, that are not just based on cosmetic appearance of the homes. Also, ensuring that families with special needs do not have extra layers of red tape to have access to ADA homes, or reasonable accommodations. Military families make sacrifices every day. A safe home should not be one of them.

Thank you, Senators, for the opportunity to testify, and for addressing the health and safety of military families.

