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## OSC Response to Reforms and Corrective Action at Air Force's Port Mortuary

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In response to whistleblower disclosures brought to the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), the Dover Port Mortuary Independent Review Subcommittee today recommended reforms for mortuary operations to ensure that the mishandling of human remains does not recur and that the mortuary meets the highest standards of the profession. OSC commends the seriousness with which Secretary Leon Panetta and the Defense Department have approached these sobering problems.

Our office continues to work with the U.S. Air Force to fully resolve the personnel matters related to the retaliation that was taken against the Mortuary whistleblowers. This entails both corrective actions to make the whistleblowers whole and disciplinary actions against supervisors who took part in whistleblower retaliation. The Air Force has agreed to take appropriate corrective action for the whistleblowers, and OSC expects the parties to finalize the settlement agreements shortly.

OSC plans to release its report on whistleblower retaliation in mid-March. Although OSC previously announced that the report would be released March 1, the Air Force requested additional time to complete its assessment before making final decisions on disciplinary action, and OSC has agreed to this request.

Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner noted that none of today's awareness on the Mortuary's weaknesses or the commitments to strengthen Mortuary operations would have happened without the courage of the three Air Force whistleblowers. Indeed, today's report confirms that preliminary reforms implemented at the Mortuary last year in response to the whistleblower disclosures already have improved mortuary operations. "These conscientious civil servants disclosed wrongdoing despite the risk that they would face ostracism and retaliation in exchange," Lerner said. "This again highlights the fact that the government functions better when its employees are free to report wrongdoing."

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*The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. Our basic authorities come from four federal statutes: the Civil Service Reform Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Hatch Act, and the Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). OSC's primary mission is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing. For more information, please visit our website at [www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov).*