

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

September 13, 2023

General Laura Richardson
Commander
U.S. Southern Command
9301 NW 33rd Street
Doral, FL 33172

Dear General Richardson:

I write with regard to the cancellation of two planned showings of “Sound of Freedom” at U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) headquarters in Doral, Florida. The film, which centers around child sex trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean, grossed more than \$185 million in theaters, making it one of the most successful, independent movies ever produced.¹ While reporting suggests that SOUTHCOM unexpectedly cancelled the movie due to concerns about “copyright infringement,” I am aware that its producers and the studio have communicated that this is not an impediment for the movie to be shown at SOUTHCOM to service members and their families. As such, since the concern which led to the cancellation has now been addressed, I urge you to rectify this situation and ensure that the screenings of the film be rescheduled without delay.

The topic of the film is directly in line with SOUTHCOM’s mission to combat trafficking and transnational criminal organizations in the command’s area of responsibility (AOR), especially considering that the film’s real-life events occurred in the AOR. SOUTHCOM identifies promoting respect for human rights in the AOR as one of its top priorities, and all U.S. military personnel assigned to SOUTHCOM or deployed to the AOR, are required to participate in human rights awareness education. Further, Combating Trafficking in Persons training is required, and SOUTHCOM’s Human Rights Office focuses on developing AOR-specific guidance for U.S. military personnel to identify indicators of human trafficking.²

Given SOUTHCOM’s robust leadership on combatting trafficking in persons, and the relevance of the “Sound of Freedom” movie to SOUTHCOM’s mission, I was alarmed to learn of the decision to cancel the film’s screenings at SOUTHCOM. Especially given the fact that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) regularly works with movie studios to host viewings of films on U.S. military installations for service members and their families. As an example, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service offered advanced screenings of “Elvis” at more than 20

¹ <https://time.com/6304595/sound-of-freedom-controversy-success/>

² <https://www.southcom.mil/Commanders-Priorities/Strengthen-Partnerships/Human-Rights/>

U.S. Air Force and Army bases last year.³ This is not a novel concept – and one in which DoD has a long history of supporting such events for service members and their families.

As the producers and distributors of “Sound of Freedom” have consented to screening the movie at SOUTHCOM, there is no issue with copyright infringement claims. In fact, I understand that Angel Studios offered to send a representative of the film to meet with SOUTHCOM personnel and their families after the screenings to answer questions. Despite this clarification it appears SOUTHCOM continues to block showing the movie because it is “already accessible.” I hope you agree that what matters is whether the movie is worth showing to the troops and potentially meeting the filmmakers, not whether the troops can buy a movie ticket or stream the film on their own. As such, I request immediate confirmation that “Sound of Freedom” will be shown at SOUTHCOM as originally planned.

I appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', is centered below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

³ <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2022-06-09/free-screening-of-elvis-at-military-bases-6284088.html>