

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 5, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper:

As our nation prepares to confront the coronavirus global health emergency, we write to express our concern regarding the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (OUSD(A&S)) withholding \$104 million in payments to the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick and the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Chemical Defense (USAMRICD) at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

As you know, USAMRIID is the Department's lead laboratory for medical biological defense research. Their research helps to protect the American warfighter from biological threats and investigate disease outbreaks and threats to public health. Research conducted at USAMRIID leads to therapeutics, vaccines, diagnostics, and information that benefit military personnel and civilians. USAMRICD is the nation's leading science and technology laboratory in the area of medical chemical countermeasures research and development.

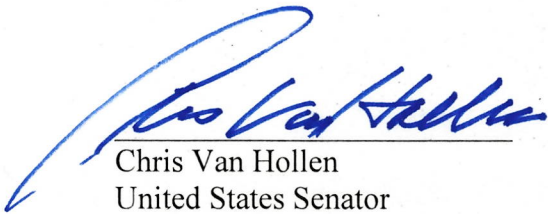
Given the critical contributions of USAMRIID and USAMRICD to our national security, including their role in responding to the coronavirus outbreak, we were alarmed to learn that the OUSD(A&S) has withheld payment for laboratory research since September 2019.

Furthermore, we express concern that OUSD(A&S) is considering reducing the operational capacity at USAMRIID and USAMRICD. As you know, missions that require both a highly-skilled workforce and the ability to surge in times of crisis, like chemical and biological research, cannot simply be slashed when no emergency is present. The men and women who are the heart of these laboratories have numerous opportunities available to them. This capacity, once reduced, cannot be rebuilt overnight.

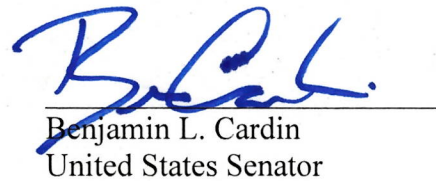
Lastly, in a November 2019 letter, Members of Congress expressed their concern to you regarding the Defense Department's continuing efforts to make drastic programmatic changes without consulting Congress. As we have previously made clear, senior level budget reviews from the Office of the Secretary of Defense must be coordinated with Congress to ensure we are adhering to our Constitutional obligations.

We urge you to work with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment to promptly release the funds necessary for the continued operation of USAMRIID and USAMRICD and ensure that the Department is more transparent with its budgeting decisions in the future. Additionally, we ask that the Army and the OSD provide our offices with an update no later than February 28, 2020 on the progress made toward resolving any outstanding issues and releasing any remaining withheld funds.

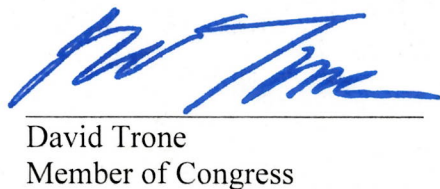
Sincerely,



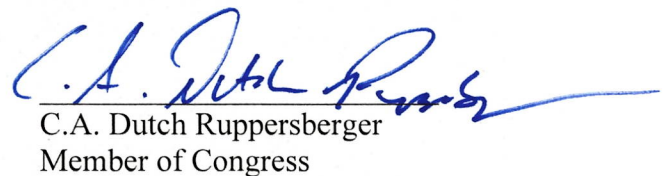
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



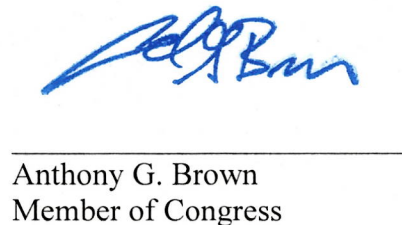
David Trone
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress