

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 25, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Esper,

We write to request a briefing with updates on the status of the Department of Defense's (DoD) implementation of Section 550D of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA) (P.L. 116-92). This provision directs DoD to enhance the capability of military criminal investigative organizations to prevent and combat child sexual exploitation.

We are seeing a disturbingly sharp increase in peer-to-peer sharing of child pornography images and videos online. A *New York Times* investigation reported that tech companies alone flagged over 45 million images and videos as child sexual abuse and exploitation. DoD's initiative to combat child exploitation is an important step in closing the gap in training and expertise within the federal government.

Section 550D of the NDAA directs DoD to work with internal and external functional experts to train the personnel of military criminal investigative organizations across the department. DoD must train personnel on this use of technologies, tools, and techniques, including digital forensics, to enhance the investigation of child sexual exploitation. DoD must also train personnel, in partnership and coordination with highly qualified national child protection organizations with demonstrated expertise, to conduct evidence-based forensic interviewing of child victims, and the referral of child victims for trauma-informed mental and medical health care, and other treatment and support services.

Additionally, the NDAA requires DoD to collaborate with federal, state, local, tribal, and other civilian law enforcement agencies on issues relating to child sexual exploitation, including by participating in specialized task forces, establishing cooperative agreements to facilitate co-training and collaboration with such agencies. DoD must establish a streamlined process for the referral of child sexual exploitation cases to other agencies and jurisdictions. Furthermore, DoD must assist in educating the military community on the prevention of and response to child sexual exploitation.

This directive was also echoed by a February 2020 Government Accountability Office report on guidance and collaboration needed to improve the department's tracking and response to child abuse. The timely implementation of these provisions is critical to ensure that all available federal government resources are being delivered to protect children and combat the perpetuation and sharing of inappropriate content.

It is imperative that DoD fully implement Section 550D and begin the necessary work of ending child sexual exploitation. Thank you for your attention to our request, and we look forward to your written response.

Sincerely,



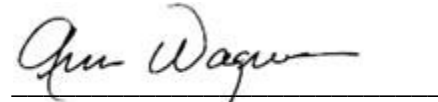
BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator



ABIGAIL SPANBERGER
Member of Congress



ANN WAGNER
Member of Congress