

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 3, 2020

The Honorable Christopher C. Miller  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Acting Secretary Miller:

We write to thank the Department of Defense for the support it has provided to domestic firefighting, and to request that these efforts be extended and expanded. As we near the end of one of the worst fire seasons on record, DOD's unique capabilities are sorely needed now and in the coming years to augment the brave firefighters who work to save lives and homes from out of control blazes. The Department has an important skill set that it brings to supporting firefighting efforts both at home and abroad, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response remain a core national priority.

According to the National Interagency Fire Center, wildfires have burned approximately 8,400,000 acres of land in the United States in 2020 alone, the worst fire season on record and with elevated threats of wildfires still present. Unfortunately extreme fire seasons have become increasingly common, and we are likely to see more of these extreme weather events in the coming years.

The DOD has extended important assistance to firefighters through the DOD's FireGuard program, which allows National Guard analysts to detect wildfires within minutes of initiation, often providing the first notification to emergency responders. This permits those responders to much more quickly and effectively put out the flames. The national FireGuard program is authorized until December 15th, after which it will expire. Unless the authorization is extended, states will likely lose access to this important capability and National Guard forces may lose a critical training and readiness opportunity. FireGuard provides useful and highly effective preparation for National Guard personnel as they train to support U.S. military operations abroad, while also making available to firefighters certain lifesaving tools which they could not otherwise access. We ask that the FireGuard program be extended permanently.

In addition, DOD has used artificial intelligence algorithms to help analysts map fires faster, rapidly putting information into the hands of first responders. However, in early September, DOD decided to end its development of these algorithms. We urge DOD to continue its support for this technology as well as further research and development into other fire tracking and prediction capabilities.

Beyond these specific programs, we hope that DOD will continue to prioritize its role in supporting civil authorities and conducting disaster relief operations. The COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, hurricanes, and wildfires have stretched state budgets and first responders to the

brink and put the lives and livelihoods of Americans at dire risk. During this time of crisis, DOD must recognize its vital and enduring role and continue to invest in unique capabilities that only it can bring to this mission.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



ADAM B. SCHIFF  
Member of Congress

PETE AGUILAR  
Member of Congress

ANNA G. ESHOO  
Member of Congress

GRACE F. NAPOLITANO  
Member of Congress

NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN  
Member of Congress

JOHN GARAMENDI  
Member of Congress

JIMMY PANETTA  
Member of Congress

KAREN BASS  
Member of Congress

JIMMY GOMEZ  
Member of Congress

KATIE PORTER  
Member of Congress

AMI BERA  
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

DORIS MATSUI  
Member of Congress

MARK DESAULNIER  
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