

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 5, 2017

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

You have said repeatedly that your number one priority is to protect the American people from harm. It is for that reason we write today with profound concern regarding plans in your Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) budget request to reduce the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) by 28% in order to fund a border wall. Most specifically, immediately after the release of your budget, the S&T Directorate began planning the closure of the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (NBACC) on Fort Detrick and the Chemical Security Analysis Center (CSAC) on Aberdeen Proving Ground. These actions are alarming and will put the American people at greater risk of a chemical or biological terrorist attack. This fateful decision is compounded by the fact that your administration's work toward closing these facilities is beginning well before Congress has enacted an appropriations bill for FY 2018, which runs afoul of the basic principles of checks and balances established in the Constitution. Congress fully funded both the NBACC and CSAC in the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations measure you signed into law last month.

The NBACC was directed in 2004 to provide our national security apparatus and federal law enforcement agencies with state-of-the art, cutting-edge laboratory capabilities to characterize newly identified biological threats and analyze their planned or actual capacity for delivery and to do forensic analysis in support of law enforcement investigations and prosecution. The work of this lab was considered so vital to U.S. national security that the federal government invested more than one half-billion dollars on the construction and staffing of the lab (which opened in 2011). The NBACC's two centers – the National Bioforensic Analysis Center (NBFAC) and the National Biological Threat Characterization Center (NBTCC) – conduct technical analyses in support of federal law enforcement investigations and identify biological vulnerabilities and hazards to our nation. The NBACC labs have the unique ability to conduct classified work for the intelligence community and for the Department of Defense at biosafety level (BSL) 4, in order to counter emerging threats and study pathogens where no vaccine or treatment exists.

The NBACC mission continues to be crucial to U.S. national security. The closure of this lab will be disastrous. This is a one-of-a-kind facility, with one-of-a-kind capabilities that cannot be replicated, and it provides critical support to multiple agencies throughout the government. Fort Detrick is a center of gravity in the defense of our nation against biological threats and its selection as the home of the NBACC mission was purposeful for the expertise and knowledge found there. The scientists and technicians there now have spent years developing highly specialized expertise and are now our nation's leading experts in the field. This talent is irreplaceable.

The Department of Homeland Security established the CSAC in 2006 to address chemical threats and hazards to the homeland. This lab is the only government asset capable of providing around-the-clock reachback in the event of a chemical threat. The Center delivers immediate, accurate, and actionable instructions to first responders at the federal, state, and local level.

CSAC plays a proactive role in identifying vulnerabilities in our nation's infrastructure, effectively mitigating damages from accidental chemical discharge to terrorist attacks. The loss of this laboratory will significantly compromise our homeland security.

We urge you to suspend any actions that would lead to the closure of these two facilities, both of which play vital roles in America's national security and the safety of the American people which cannot be replicated elsewhere. Closing these labs will only serve to put our country at risk by creating chemical and biological vulnerabilities that terrorists and adversaries are anxious to exploit. The risk of biological and chemical agents being used is increasing. This is not the time to be weakening our defenses against such weapons.

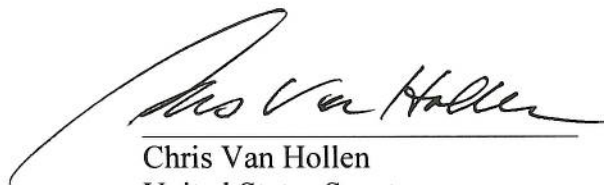
You should direct the Department of Homeland Security and Office of Management and Budget to reverse immediately any actions they have taken to shutter these facilities, while allowing Congress to carry out its constitutional responsibilities of oversight and appropriations.

We will vigorously oppose any attempt to close the doors of these facilities, which are actively engaged in the daily protection of the people of this country. It is clear to Congress and should be clear to you that the threats our nation faces from chemical and biological terrorist attacks far exceed any perceived benefit of a wall on our southern border.

Sincerely,



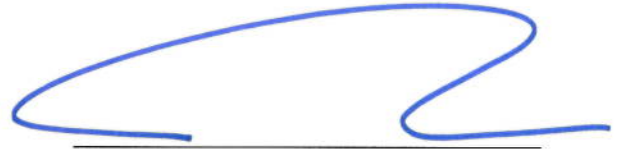
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress



John K. Delaney
Member of Congress

cc: Mick Mulvaney, Director, Office of Management and Budget
Secretary John Kelly, Department of Homeland Security
Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Department of Justice
Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats