

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 16, 2026

The Honorable Troy E. Meink
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

The Honorable Daniel Driscoll
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

The Honorable Secretary John Phelan
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Meink, Secretary Driscoll, and Secretary Phelan,

As members of the bipartisan Military Depot and Industrial Facilities Caucus, we are writing to flag an important change made to Department of War (“DOW”) personnel recruitment and retention policy under Sec. 1108 of the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, which modified the definition of defense industrial base facility in Section 1125(c)(1) of P.L. 114-328 for the purposes of expanding direct hire authority for depots, shipyards, and arsenals.

Sec. 1108 of the FY26 NDAA widens the definition to include all “supporting agencies” of the same installation that support depot-level maintenance, which include program and management analysts, facilities mechanics, air conditioning equipment mechanics, training instructors, human resource specialists, and safety/occupational health management staff. This policy change will help the nation’s government-owned, government-operated industrial facilities become more competitive with private industry and help them quickly obtain the skilled technicians needed to maintain, equip, and support legacy weapon systems. It will also enable the Department of War to quickly hire veterans after their departure from the military, rather than forcing them to wait six months to enter civilian employment at the DOW (the military frequently loses valuable and skilled workers to the private sector where they can start a new career much faster).

For reference, Section 1125(c)(1) of P.L. 114-328 (FY2017 NDAA), defined ‘defense industrial base facility’ as “a facility that is owned or operated by a contractor and that is used to perform work on a defense contract, and that is located in the United States.” After the amendment modified this definition to say “a facility that is owned or operated by a contractor and that is used to perform work on a defense contract, and that is located in the United States **and includes supporting units of a facility at an installation or base.**”

After extensive engagement with the organic industrial base facilities in our districts, we found that key supportive maintenance and sustainment roles at these installations were not being filled via direct hire authority. Rather, the services had been narrowly interpreting this law to only hire engineers doing hands-on repair work on weapons systems through this fast-track system. This was leaving thousands open positions related to software sustainment, avionics overhaul, spare engine maintenance, commodities groups, and propulsion engineers across the organic industrial base outside the perimeters of direct hire authority and

subject to an excruciatingly slow competitive hire process - despite being vital to military readiness. For example, at Tinker AFB, of the approximately 10,000 workers at the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Complex, only around 3,000 meet the definition of hands-on repair work while the rest work in wider support roles.

Narrow interpretations of the services' direct hire authority have directly impacted their ability to manage attrition and to recruit for increased workload. We also believe that these hiring limitations have increased DoW's reliance on private contractors for depot-level maintenance workloads, a massive national security threat given that private contractors don't ultimately answer to U.S. national security interests and readiness timelines. More broadly, our depots, arsenals, and shipyards are struggling to keep up with increasingly competitive hiring environments in the private sector. Expanding direct hire authority will ensure the DOW's entire organic industrial base has quick and timely access to candidates with active security clearances and the specialized skills required to support our defense missions and national security priorities.

With this new change in mind, we are requesting that your offices submit to the signatories, within 90 days, a written strategy for how the Department of the Air Force, Department of the Army, and Department of the Navy each plan to utilize this expanded definition of 'defense industrial base' for the purposes of direct hire authority. We also request, within six months, a written response on how the Department has used direct hire authority to manage workforce attrition and recruitment needs for depot-level maintenance and support positions, how many positions have been filled via direct hire authority this year compared to the previous two fiscal years, and how many positions you plan to fill with direct hire authority in the upcoming fiscal year.

The defense industrial base's aging and outdated approach to hiring needs to change. Without a robust sustainment workforce, the viability of our legacy systems as an effective deterrent against China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea wanes. At a time when the federal government's workforce is already rapidly aging, the DOW needs to unlock every tool at its disposal to generate new talent, particularly from the retired military community who already possess many of these skills and security clearances.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Blake D. Moore
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



James Lankford
United States Senator




Michael Cloud
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Donald G. Davis
Member of Congress



Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress