

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 15, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write about your costly and dangerous decision to purge the Pentagon's Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) office and significantly limit testing of the safety and effectiveness of weapons bought by the Department. Specifically, we are concerned that on August 7, 2025, DOT&E removed nearly 100 programs of the 251 programs on its oversight list.¹ To date you have refused to provide any analysis to justify or support these reductions.² We remain concerned these reckless decisions undermine readiness and will result in substantial waste of taxpayer dollars while putting servicemembers' lives at risk. We urge you to immediately reverse the decision to cut the size and scope of this office, and to restore oversight to the nearly 100 programs from the DOT&E oversight list.

DOT&E was created by Congress in 1983 after a bipartisan vote of 91-5 in the Senate.³ The DOT&E office is independent, and provides critical oversight of new weapons systems to "evaluat[e] ... the operational effectiveness, suitability, survivability, and lethality of DoD weapon systems in combat."⁴ The office has continued to provide insights that protect service members' lives and ensure U.S. weapons are effective. During the Afghan surge, 75% of service members casualties were due to improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁵ DOT&E was able to identify deficiencies "that permitted improvements to be made to the [Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP)] vehicles" that protect troops from IEDs,⁶ and as a result, more than 2,000 service members' lives were saved.⁷

¹ Federal News Network, "DoD's independent testing office drops nearly 100 programs from oversight list," Anastasia Obis, August 28, 2025, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/defense-news/2025/08/dods-independent-testing-office-drops-nearly-100-programs-from-oversight-list/?readmore=1>; U.S. Department of Defense, Director of Operational Test & Evaluation, "T&E Oversight List," August 7, 2025, pp. 5, <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/oversight/TE%20Oversight%20List%2020250731%20www%20extract.pdf?ver=5PIRYK33BemL7uAeKNbnWQ%3D%3D>.

² On file with Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren.

³ Senate Amendment 1478 to Department of Defense Authorization Act, 1984, S.675, <https://www.congress.gov/amendment/98th-congress/senate-amendment/1478?s=1&r=36>.

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Director of Operational Test & Evaluation, "DOT&E's Mission," <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/FY2024/other/2024mission.pdf?ver=KGF7pKr29mlQlisGJ4BFtA%3d%3d>.

⁵ Robert Gates, Duty, Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, p. 446.

⁶ National Defense, "History of U.S. Weapons Proves Value of Realistic Operational Testing," Michael Gilmore, January 1, 2015, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2015/1/1/2015january-history-of-us-weapons-proves-value-of-realistic-operational-testing>.

⁷ Business Insider, "One Quote Shows the Radical Transformation of the Pentagon Under Robert Gates," Paul Szoldra, March 28, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/bob-gates-pentagon-mrap-2014-3>.

In a June 17th letter, Senator Warren raised concerns about your decision to “immediately eliminate any non-statutory” functions of the DOT&E office.⁸ The decision reduced the testing office’s budget by nearly 80% and cut the offices staff by about 74%.⁹ The cuts and reductions to this office created fears that the office would be limited in its ability to conduct reviews and evaluations of weapons and weapons systems, and that they would cut so deep the office would no longer be able to even meet its basic statutory functions.¹⁰

You have claimed that your decision to reduce DOT&E’s workforce was based on a “comprehensive internal review.”¹¹ Yet, when Senator Warren asked you to do so, you refused to release or provide Congress with any study or analysis to justify the purge of DOT&E office or for any estimated cost savings.¹² There is no evidence that DoD has assessed the operational and financial risks of slashing the DOT&E office, and whether this action puts our national security objectives at risk. We are even more concerned by press reports indicating that these reductions were a direct attack on the office’s independence in retaliation for the office’s decision to include the Golden Dome program on its oversight list.¹³

You responded to Senator Warren’s letter on August 5, 2025, indicating that 251 programs were on DOT&E’s oversight list.¹⁴ But two days later, DOT&E quietly updated its website and eliminated 94 programs, a 37% reduction.¹⁵ Concerningly, the new oversight list is dated as July 31, 2025, raising concerns that DoD’s August 5, 2025 response to Congress was purposely inaccurate.

DoD’s significant cuts to weapons system oversight will increase safety and operational risks to the force. One of the programs cut from operational testing from DOT&E’s oversight list is the Future Long Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA) program.¹⁶ This is one of the Army’s highest priority programs, intended to augment or replace a portion of the UH-60 Black Hawk utility

⁸ Secretary of Defense, “Reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation,” May 27, 2025, <https://media.defense.gov/2025/May/28/2003725153/-1/-1/1/MEMORANDUM-DIRECTING-REORGANIZATION-OF-THE-OFFICE-OF-THE-DIRECTOR-OF-OPERATIONAL-TEST-AND-EVALUATION.PDF>.

⁹ U.S. Naval Institute News, “Pentagon Cutting Weapons Testing Office Budget by 80%, Staff Reduced,” Mallory Shelbourne, June 2, 2025, <https://news.usni.org/2025/06/02/pentagon-weapons-testing-office-budget-to-be-cut-by-80-staff-reduced>.

¹⁰ Senator Elizabeth Warren, “Warren to Hegseth: Gutting Military Weapons Testing Office Could Violate the Law, “Will Cost Service Members’ Lives and Waste Taxpayer Dollars,” press release, June 17, 2025, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-to-hegseth-gutting-military-weapons-testing-office-could-violate-the-law-will-cost-service-members-lives-and-waste-taxpayer-dollars>.

¹¹ Federal News Network, “DoD’s independent testing office drops nearly 100 programs from oversight list,” Anastasia Obis, August 28, 2025, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/defense-news/2025/08/dods-independent-testing-office-drops-nearly-100-programs-from-oversight-list/?readmore=1>.

¹² Senator Elizabeth Warren, “Warren to Hegseth: Gutting Military Weapons Testing Office Could Violate the Law, “Will Cost Service Members’ Lives and Waste Taxpayer Dollars,” press release, June 17, 2025, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-to-hegseth-gutting-military-weapons-testing-office-could-violate-the-law-will-cost-service-members-lives-and-waste-taxpayer-dollars>.

¹³ Center for Strategic and International Studies, “America’s ‘Golden Dome’ Explained,” Jim Watson, June 4, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/americas-golden-dome-explained>.

¹⁴ On file with Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren.

¹⁵ On file with Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, Director of Operational Test & Evaluation, “T&E Oversight List,” August 7, 2025, <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/oversight/TE%20Oversight%20List%2020250731%20www%20extract.pdf?ver=5PIRYK33BemL7uAeKNbnWQ%3D%3D>.

helicopter fleet.¹⁷ With the Army attempting to accelerate this program before developmental or operational testing is complete,¹⁸ DOT&E has an absolutely essential role to play in holding the Army to account through vigorous testing for safety, survivability, and suitability.

Other top DoD priorities that have been inexplicably removed from DOT&E's oversight list are the Enterprise Space-Based Missile Warning and Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture, which could enable the Golden Dome architecture.¹⁹ Although the Administration has provided extremely limited details on what systems and objectives will be folded into Golden Dome,²⁰ numerous key Space Force programs would provide both tracking and data transport capabilities needed for a broader missile defense system to be effective.²¹ Many of these programs, such as Enterprise Space-Based Missile Warning, Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture Tranche 2 Enterprise, Space-Based Infrared Systems Survivable and Endurable Evolution, and Upgraded Early Warning Radar, were removed from the DOT&E oversight list.²² If homeland missile defense is truly a top priority for the Department, rigorous testing and oversight is vital to ensure the systems are integrated and that funding is not being wasted on systems that do not tie into the broader architecture.

As taxpayers invest billions of dollars into new weapons programs each year, it is DoD's duty to ensure programs work. If taxpayers are investing at the very least \$74.5 billion into new weapon systems removed from DOT&E's oversight list,²³ DoD must ensure that they work for our servicemembers.

The decision to further purge the DOT&E office by cutting nearly 100 programs from its oversight list jeopardizes military readiness, puts the safety of our servicemembers at risk, and increases the risk of waste and abuse of hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars. We ask that you reverse these cuts to the DOT&E office.

In addition, to understand the justification for your DOT&E cuts, and to assist us in fulfilling our legislative responsibilities as members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, we ask that you provide answers to the following questions no later than October 29, 2025.

1. What studies, analysis, or reports were conducted to provide justification for the May 28, 2025, memo that significantly reduced DOT&E's budget and staff?

¹⁷ Director of Operational Test and Evaluation, "Future Long Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA)," 2022, <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/FY2022/army/2022flraa1.pdf>.

¹⁸ Breaking Defense, "Moving faster, sharing risk: How the Army wants to accelerate FLRAA helo program," Ashley Roque, May 27, 2025, <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/05/moving-faster-sharing-risk-how-the-army-wants-to-accelerate-flraa-helo-program/>.

¹⁹ Space Development Agency, "FAQ," <https://www.sda.mil/home/about-us/faq/>.

²⁰ Breaking Defense, "SASC Dems skeptical of Golden Dome price, feasibility," Valerie Insinna, September 30, 2025, <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/09/sasc-dems-skeptical-of-golden-dome-price-feasibility/#:~:text=Few%20details%20have%20emerged%20about,today's%20briefing%2C%20noting%20its%20classification>.

²¹ The White House, Presidential Actions, Executive Orders, "The Iron Dome for America," January 27, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/the-iron-dome-for-america/>.

²² U.S. Department of Defense, Director of Operational Test & Evaluation, "T&E Oversight List," August 7, 2025, <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/oversight/TE%20Oversight%20List%2020250731%20www%20extract.pdf?ver=5PIRYK33BemL7uAeKNbnWQ%3D%3D>.

²³ Data on file with Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren.

- a. Please provide all studies, analysis, and reports conducted to justify the May 28, 2025, memo.
2. What was the process for determining the 99 programs that were cut from DOT&E's oversight list?
3. Was the oversight list reduced to align with staffing reductions at DOT&E?
4. What is DoD's plan for ensuring that taxpayer dollars are not wasted due to deficiencies in programs removed from the oversight list?
5. What is DoD's plan for ensuring "the operational effectiveness, suitability, survivability, and lethality of DoD weapon systems in combat"²⁴ for the 99 programs that have been removed from the oversight list?
6. Were DoD DOGE team personnel involved in the "internal DoD review of redundancies and inefficiencies" as described in your August 5, 2025, response letter?²⁵
 - a. Did DOGE have any decision-making authority in this review?
 - b. Did DOGE complete any studies, analysis, or reports to justify DOT&E cuts?
 - i. If so, please provide those studies, analysis, or reports that justify DOT&E cuts.
7. Did DoD consult with any other outside stakeholders – such as defense industry representatives – in compiling this list? If so, please list all such stakeholders.
8. For each of the 99 programs that were cut from this year's DOT&E oversight list, please provide a brief description of the rationale and justification for doing so.
9. For programs that are still on the oversight list, how is DoD ensuring that they are fully responding – in a timely way – to DOT&E requests? Has DOT&E changed any criteria with regard to timeliness or other response requirements?

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress

²⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Director of Operational Test & Evaluation, "DOT&E's Mission," <https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/FY2024/other/2024mission.pdf?ver=KGF7pKr29mlQlisGJ4BFtA%3d%3d>.

²⁵ On file with Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren.