

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 12, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write regarding our ongoing concerns about your costly and reckless decision to purge the office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) at the Pentagon. To date, the Department has failed to appropriately address the concerns of Congress¹ and provide any analysis to justify the decision to “immediately implement a strategic and deliberate reorganization” of the DOT&E office.² A new Government Accountability Office (GAO) performance audit revealed that this reorganization has created significant deficiencies that “reduced DOT&E’s capacity to oversee operational and live fire test and evaluation for the 173 DOD [Department of Defense] weapon system programs on its oversight list in 2025”³ and “increase the risk of weapon systems being delivered to the warfighters with undocumented shortfalls related to effectiveness, suitability, survivability, or lethality.”⁴ The decision to purge the office of DOT&E has created significant and unnecessary risk that places readiness, service members’ safety, acquisition reform, and taxpayer dollars at risk.

We are also concerned about the recent removal of DOT&E’s annual reports from its official website.⁵ One of the most important functions of DOT&E is to provide transparency about the safety and effectiveness of major weapon systems. A key element of this function is the release of publicly available annual reports that detail findings by DOT&E to make sure critical deficiencies are fixed so service members are not harmed or killed. While it is necessary for some findings to be classified to protect national security, the requirement for an unclassified report has always been the intent of Congress and understood by the Department for over 40 years. The law is clear that, if a report is classified or controlled unclassified, “the Director shall concurrently submit to Congress a version of the report that is unclassified and does not require

¹ MilitaryTimes, “Pentagon’s push to field weapons faster risks outrunning its own oversight, watchdog finds,” Michael Scanlon, July 1, 2026, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2026/07/01/pentagons-push-to-field-weapons-faster-risks-outrunning-its-own-oversight-watchdog-finds/>.

² Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, “Reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation,” memorandum, May 27, 2025, p. 1, <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>.

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DOD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108859>.

⁴ Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DOD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 18, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

⁵ The Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, “Sorry!,” https://www.dote.osd.mil/page-not-found?original_path=/annualreport/.

safeguarding or dissemination controls.”⁶ These reports were all unclassified, so it is unclear what justification, if any, the Department has for withholding them from the public. Removing these reports appears to be an attempt to avoid disclosure of information the public needs to evaluate if major, high-dollar weapon systems are effective and safe.⁷

The DOT&E office serves a critical role in ensuring weapon systems are safe and effective for combat use. Congress established this office in 1983 after a bipartisan 91-5 vote in the Senate⁸ after horrifying scandals exposed longstanding deficiencies in operational testing of weapons systems, including the M16 malfunctions during the Vietnam War and test failures of the Sergeant York Divisional Air Defense (DIVAD) gun.⁹ Congress created this office to be a statutorily independent authority that reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and Congress.¹⁰

On May 27, 2025, your office published a reorganization plan that resulted in a staffing reduction of approximately 74 percent and a budgetary reduction of almost 80 percent.¹¹ At the time the cuts were made, one former Trump official warned that the office would not “have the resources to be able to accomplish all those [statutorily required] tasks with only...a couple of handfuls of people.”¹² The GAO’s review found that these staffing changes ultimately reduced authorized civilian manpower from 126 positions down to 30,¹³ which “reduced DOT&E’s ability to oversee operational and live fire testing and evaluation.”¹⁴ These reductions included the elimination of civilian senior staff that had put the office “on more equal standing” with military leadership of weapon programs, which “contributed to the military departments’ view of DOT&E’s relevance in decision-making for test and evaluation.”¹⁵

The reorganization memorandum also impacted the number of programs on DOT&E’s oversight list, which decreased from 265 to 173.¹⁶ Even with fewer programs on the office’s oversight list,

⁶ 10 U.S.C. § 139.

⁷ Breaking Defense, “Pentagon tester to restrict info on weapons programs, raising transparency concerns,” Valerie Insinna, December 6, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/12/pentagon-tester-to-restrict-info-on-weapons-programs-raising-transparency-concerns/>.

⁸ 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>.

⁹ Project On Government Oversight, “Fact Sheet: Cuts to DOT&E Weapons Testing Put Troops at Risk,” 2025, p. 1, <https://docs.pogo.org/resource/2025/Fact-Sheet-Cuts-to-DOTandE-Weapons-Testing-Put-Troops-at-Risk.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation, “About DOT&E,” <https://www.dote.osd.mil/About/>.

¹¹ Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, “Reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation,” memorandum, May 27, 2025, <https://media.defense.gov/2025/May/28/2003725153/-1/-1/1/MEMORANDUM-DIRECTINGREORGANIZATION-OF-THE-OFFICE-OF-THE-DIRECTOR-OF-OPERATIONAL-TEST-AND-EVALUATION.PDF>; USNI 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>.

¹² USNI 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>.

¹³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DoD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 15, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

¹⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DoD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108859>.

¹⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DoD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 21, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Id.*, p. 16.

action officers reported that the workforce reductions resulted in “being assigned more programs, programs in warfare areas for which they lack subject matter expertise, or both.”¹⁷ These changes put taxpayer dollars at risk, and threaten national security and service members’ lives. According to GAO, the budgetary cuts to the office “increase[d] the risk of weapon systems being delivered to the warfighter with undocumented shortfalls related to effectiveness, suitability, survivability, or lethality.”¹⁸

The DOT&E reorganization also “end[ed] all contractor personnel support”¹⁹ provided by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a nonprofit organization that provides objective analytic expertise²⁰ that “manages DOD’s raw test and evaluation data.”²¹ According to action officers, their ability to perform program oversight was hampered “for roughly 2 months due to the lack of access to IDA’s centralized test and evaluation data,”²² which created additional challenges for action officers “who were attempting to cover oversight responsibilities for their colleagues who were part of the DOT&E staff reductions.”²³ The reorganization also restricted staff access to Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities (SCIFs) and ultimately “impose[d] challenges for conducting oversight work in classified settings.”²⁴

Last year, the GAO found that DoD’s test and evaluation policies “do not consistently reflect leading practices”²⁵ that are “essential to delivering relevant capabilities on timelines responsive to users’ needs.”²⁶ GAO’s findings highlight the importance of driving rapid, iterative testing approaches into weapon systems acquisition programs. Leading practices, including to “involve testers early,” were “largely not reflected in the policies for programs in the major capability acquisition and middle tier of acquisition [MTA] pathways” that make up a “majority of DOD spending on weapon systems acquisition.”²⁷ The latest GAO report identified concerns that “military departments [are] potentially using the MTA pathway and other rapid prototyping efforts to avoid operational and live fire testing requirements.”²⁸ Congress appropriated \$10.6 million in fiscal year 2024 to “enable increased oversight of MTA programs,” and as of February 2026, “15 of roughly 110 total MTA efforts were on DOT&E’s oversight list.”²⁹ Cuts to

¹⁷ *Id.*, p. 18.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, “Reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation,” memorandum, May 27, 2025, p. 1, <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>.

²⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, “Institute for Defense Analyses,” <https://www.cto.mil/dtea/ida/>.

²¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DoD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 19, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: DOD Needs to Update Policies to Better Support Modernization Efforts,” December 11, 2025, p. 9, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-107009.pdf>.

²⁶ *Id.*, p. 40.

²⁷ *Id.*, GAO Highlights.

²⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DoD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 20, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

²⁹ *Id.*

DOT&E's staff and capacity may only further increase the previously identified risk of failing to incorporate testing officials to address problems in acquisition programs.

Following the publishing of the DOT&E reorganization memorandum, Congress reiterated DOT&E's vital role, including requiring the Secretary of Defense to "ensure that the amount requested for the Office of the Director in the Department of Defense budget for each fiscal year is sufficient to enable the Director to fulfill the duties and responsibilities" required by statute, as well as resources for contracts with federally funded research and development centers to provide support.³⁰ The GAO audit reveals that these requirements are not currently being met. DoD must ensure that weapon systems are safe and are effective for the battlefield. We have serious concerns that as of May 2026, DoD has not provided any justification to support the DOT&E reorganization effort or provided the congressionally mandated analysis on the impacts of these cuts.³¹

The decision to purge the office of DOT&E has created significant and unnecessary risk that jeopardizes readiness, service member safety, acquisition reform, and taxpayer dollars. We urge you to reverse the cuts made to this office to restore trust that DoD weapon systems are effective for combat use and safe for our warfighters at a justifiable cost to the American taxpayer.

In addition, it is the intent of Congress that DOT&E provide unclassified annual reports that are available to the public. These reports offer transparency and accountability to make sure critical failures are fixed so DoD does not recklessly risk service members' lives. We urge you to immediately restore all reports that have been removed from the DOT&E website and resume the release of unclassified, publicly available reports.

As members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, we request the following information no later than August 26, 2026:

1. What studies, analysis, or reports were conducted to inform the May 27, 2025 memorandum³² that significantly reduced DOT&E's budget and staff?
2. What studies, analysis, or reports identified a cost savings estimate of "more than \$300 million per year" that the May 27, 2025 memorandum states will result from the directed DOT&E reorganization, and who generated the cost savings analysis?
3. How does DoD's analysis of the future budget and staffing of DOT&E take into consideration the impact of the military services reducing their test and evaluation capabilities?
4. The GAO found that "SES Deputy Directors previously provided for the continuity of operations across changes in Administrations and Directors."³³ Provided that Deputy Director SES-level members have been replaced by GS-15 action officers, how will

³⁰ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, Public Law 119-60, Section 904.

³¹ Government Accountability Office, "Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DoD's Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation," June 30, 2026, p. 18, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

³² Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, "Reorganization of the Office of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation," memorandum, May 27, 2025, p. 1, <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>.

³³ *Id.*, p. 21.

DOT&E ensure continuity of operations through successive administrations, and what analysis informed this decision?

5. What are DoD's plans going forward for the SES positions within DOT&E at the Deputy Director level and in other roles within the office?
6. What role has the reduction in staffing played in reducing the number of programs on the DOT&E oversight list since the May 27, 2025 memorandum?
7. How does DoD plan to address gaps in subject matter expertise due to the DOT&E reorganization?³⁴
8. What is DoD's plan for mitigating the risk of weapon systems being delivered to the warfighter without documented evaluations related to effectiveness, suitability, survivability, and lethality due to DOT&E's reduced workforce capacity and loss of subject matter experts?
9. What is DoD's plan for ensuring adequate test and evaluation of the "effectiveness, suitability, survivability, and lethality"³⁵ of DoD weapon systems in combat for all programs that have been removed from the DOT&E oversight list?
10. How will DOT&E establish metrics to measure the office's successful performance, to include staffing duties that may be supplemented by automation and artificial intelligence?
11. Please detail the Director of DOT&E's scope of authority and discretion on the manning of DOT&E in order to accomplish its statutorily mandated role and responsibilities.
12. DoD acknowledged in a response letter to Senator Warren on August 5, 2025 that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) was involved in the "internal DoD review of redundancies and inefficiencies."³⁶ Please provide any studies, analysis, or reports provided by DOGE that may have contributed to cuts and restructuring of DOT&E.
13. To what extent, if any, did the military services or defense industry representatives participate in determining the programs that DOT&E removed from its oversight list in 2025? Please list all such participants and what justification, if any, each stakeholder may have provided to DoD.
14. Has DOT&E added any programs to its oversight list since the list was reduced to 173 programs in 2025? If so, please state which programs and provide justification for their addition to the DOT&E oversight list.
15. Has DOT&E cut additional programs from oversight since the list was reduced to 173 programs in 2025? If so, please identify the programs and provide justification for their removal from the DOT&E oversight list.
16. To what extent is DoD analyzing whether DOT&E will require additional reductions to the number of programs on its oversight list based on current staffing levels?
17. Please provide the criteria currently being used to add or remove programs from the DOT&E oversight list.
 - a. What is the process by which programs are added and removed to the oversight list? At what frequency does this review occur, and who is the decision authority?

³⁴ *Id.*, p. 18.

³⁵ *Id.*,

³⁶ Response Letter from Mr. Carroll P. Quade, August 5, 2025, On file with Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren.

18. For programs that remain on the oversight list, how is DoD ensuring complete and timely responses to DOT&E requests?
 - a. To what extent has DOT&E changed any criteria of timeliness or response requirements?
19. What risk is DoD currently assuming by reducing DOT&E oversight among the assigned warfare areas? Specifically what risks are being assumed in the air, space, missile defense, and electronic warfare areas?
 - a. Is DOT&E currently lacking subject matter expertise in these areas? If so, what is being done to address this concern?
20. How does the absence of statutory enumeration of MTA programs impact the inclusion of such programs on the DOT&E oversight list?
21. How does the absence of statutory enumeration of classified programs impact the inclusion of such programs on the DOT&E oversight list?
22. What measures has DoD taken or plans to take to ensure that DOT&E has uninterrupted access to digital test and evaluation data, “rather than relying on contractor-managed data support” as GAO found?³⁷
23. What action does DoD plan to take to address the shortfalls found by GAO related to dedicated secure workspaces for DOT&E staff to perform oversight work in classified settings?³⁸
24. As of the date of this letter, DoD and the services have not addressed any of the 13 recommendations from the GAO’s December report.³⁹ What is the Department’s plan to address these recommendations and on what timeline will they be implemented?
25. According to GAO findings, DOT&E is currently “conducting an analysis of its workforce and workload.”⁴⁰ Provide us, upon completion, this analysis such that we may ensure it meets all statutory requirements.
26. As of July 31, 2026, all of the unclassified annual reports have been removed from the official DOT&E website. What analysis drove this decision?
 - a. Under what timeline will DOT&E reinstate these reports and meet the statutory requirements under 10 U.S.C. § 139?⁴¹

³⁷ Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DOD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 23, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

³⁸ *Id.*, p. 19.

³⁹ Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: DOD Needs to Update Policies to Better Support Modernization Efforts,” December 11, 2025, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-107009>.

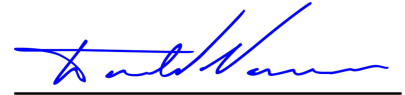
⁴⁰ Government Accountability Office, “Weapon Systems Testing: Reorganization of DOD’s Office of the Director, Operational Test and Evaluation,” June 30, 2026, p. 15, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108859.pdf>.

⁴¹ 10 U.S.C. § 139.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress