

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

May 14, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write to ask that you provide an exemption from the ongoing civilian hiring freeze for graduates of the Department of Defense Cyber Service Academy (DoD CSA). With graduation season rapidly approaching, DoD CSA students are currently unable to secure permanent employment within the Department. Simultaneously, the Department's realignment and restructuring of the civilian workforce risks eliminating unfilled positions that are otherwise critical to cybersecurity. Any failure to remedy this situation endangers national security and wastes taxpayer dollars.

Sponsored by the DoD Chief Information Officer and administered by the National Security Agency (NSA), the DoD CSA provides scholarships nationwide for students pursuing cyber and artificial intelligence degrees at universities designated as National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity. In exchange for full scholarships, DoD CSA students incur a one-year DoD service commitment for each year of enrollment. Thus, the program provides a critical training pipeline that enhances the DoD's ability to recruit and retain cyber specialists. Employing the technical expertise of these cyber professionals is essential to advancing our national security interests, including both defense of the homeland and deterrence abroad.

Despite the DoD CSA's immense benefits, we are concerned that the Department's ongoing hiring freeze, as well as its restructuring of the civilian workforce, will preclude graduates from entering federal service. As just one example, a banner on the Intelligence Community Careers webpage states, "At this time, NSA is under a hiring freeze, per DOD memorandum 'Immediate Civilian Hiring Freeze for Alignment with National Defense Priorities,' dated 28 February 2025." Without immediate and meaningful opportunity for permanent DoD employment, most of these highly skilled and marketable professionals will undoubtedly be lost to private industry. In addition to degrading national security, such a failure would result in a tremendous waste of taxpayer dollars as DoD budgets over \$100,000 per year per scholarship – to account for tuition, room, board, textbooks, school fees, school related travel, health care, and a stipend. Accordingly, and consistent with the basis for the hiring freeze itself, we are asking you to take the necessary steps to both prioritize this critical DoD mission and remain accountable to taxpayers.

The DoD CSA represents a mutually beneficial commitment between cybersecurity students and the DoD – it is essential that the Department continue to uphold its end of the bargain. If this is

not addressed soon, millions of dollars of taxpayer money will be wasted and we will be left with a gap in critical national security roles at a time when the Department is working to fill 28,000 military and civilian cyber roles. We urge you to secure permanent positions within the DoD for these graduates by lifting the hiring freeze for cybersecurity professionals and preserving critical cybersecurity roles for them in the Department. Our national security and fidelity to the American taxpayer depend on it.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

cc: Ms. Katherine Arrington, Performing the Duties of the Department of Defense Chief
Information Officer