

United States Senate

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Esper:

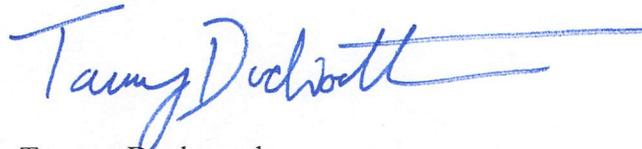
After receiving extensive briefings on the Federal Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, I am concerned that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has not yet taken proactive steps to ensure the readiness of National Guard and Reserve units to support local civilian authorities should this pandemic continue to spread. While only select communities and States have declared a state of emergency, DoD should prepare for more communities to follow suit and expect that DoD support of civilian authorities will be needed in greater capacity.

As you are aware, National Guard and Reserve engineering, medical, water purification and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) units have the capability to play a decisive role in combating the spread of the COVID-19 virus and helping communities weather and recover from any outbreak. I am concerned that the readiness of these units has not been assessed in any systematic fashion to date and that potential preparations for them to activate have yet to be taken.

Accordingly, I request that DoD brief the Senate Armed Services Committee on the state of National Guard and Reserve unit readiness to support civilian authorities as they combat the COVID-19 outbreak. This brief should include an assessment of individual unit readiness, equipment shortfalls and a concept of operation to stand up capabilities in communities before civilian health and emergency infrastructure is overwhelmed.

I am also deeply concerned about the potential impacts of school closures on the health and nutrition of vulnerable children. With its stockpiles of rations, DoD is uniquely positioned to serve as a backstop should community alternatives to school meals falter. In addition to the above request, I ask that DoD provide me with an update on the status of ration stockpiles and DoD's capability to use such stockpiles to combat hunger among children should COVID-19 preventive measures require the long-term closure of schools and family isolation. I appreciate your attention to these important matters and look forward to a timely response.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator