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HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE INVESTMENT



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February 27, 2025

**The Honorable Pete Hegseth**

Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Hegseth,

I write to express deep concern regarding the Department of Defense's (the Department) planned reductions<sup>1</sup> to the probationary workforce, particularly in light of reports<sup>2</sup> that these cuts could impact essential personnel such as the firefighters at the Naval Submarine Base New London (SUBASE NL) in Connecticut.

The danger of your Department's disastrous layoff plans without fully assessing the roles and responsibilities of those affected cannot be overstated. If workforce reductions are made based on arbitrary percentages, rather than an informed evaluation of mission-critical needs, we risk cutting personnel who provide life-saving services and compromising our ability to protect the very forces we seek to strengthen and have worked diligently to recruit and retain.

For example, firefighters at military installations, including those at the SUBASE NL in my district, are at risk of being fired because of their probationary status. These dedicated workers are not bureaucratic excess; they are an essential component of force readiness and safety. These highly trained professionals are the first line of defense in emergencies ranging from shipboard fires to hazardous material incidents, medical emergencies, and mutual aid support for surrounding communities. Reducing their numbers in the name of efficiency does not enhance our military readiness—it weakens it.

Moreover, any reduction in the firefighting workforce at SUBASE NL will cripple an already understaffed workforce. The Submarine Base Firefighters IAFF Local F-219 stated<sup>3</sup>, “if the termination of probationary employees is executed, the department will be brought to its knees, left incapable of providing emergency services with daily staffing at less than eight members at best.”

Reducing the workforce to that size not only prevents them from carrying out their critical mission, but it is a violation of current law. For example, the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act put into place clear staffing requirements for firefighting forces at military installations. Per IAFF Local F-219, SUBASE NL is required to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4074278/dod-probationary-workforce-statement/#:~:text=We%20anticipate%20reducing%20the%20Department's,restoring%20readiness%20in%20the%20force.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://theday.com/news/709677/potential-for-layoffs-unclear-at-sub-base-coast-guard-academy/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://courtney.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/courtney.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/Sub%20Base%20Firefighters%20IAFF%20Local%20F-219.pdf>

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have 17 firefighting personnel to adhere to those requirements. If your Department terminates probationary firefighters, SUBASE NL would be forced to close multiple fire companies<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, the uncertainty surrounding these cuts has understandably created a destabilizing effect on morale across the federal workforce and their families. The men and women who serve in these roles—whether as firefighters, medical personnel, base security, or logistics support—deserve clarity and assurance that their contributions to national security are not treated as expendable members of our defense team.

I strongly support greater efficiency across the federal government, but indiscriminate layoffs of vital personnel are not the way to achieve that mission. I urge the Department to conduct a thorough, role-specific assessment before implementing any layoffs to ensure it complies with current law and critical missions, including fire protection, remain fully staffed and funded.

I appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress