



United States Senate

November 15, 2019

Mr. Brian A. Benczkowski
Assistant Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Benczkowski:

I write regarding recent reports of unauthorized drones interfering in wildfire fighting efforts in California, and I ask that you prioritize the Department of Justice's resources to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute drone operators who interfere with wildfire suppression efforts.

In recent years, California has faced increasingly devastating wildfires, which have been among the deadliest and most destructive in state history. Fortunately, emergency first responders have been able to act quickly this year to contain and suppress fires, saving countless communities, homes, and lives.

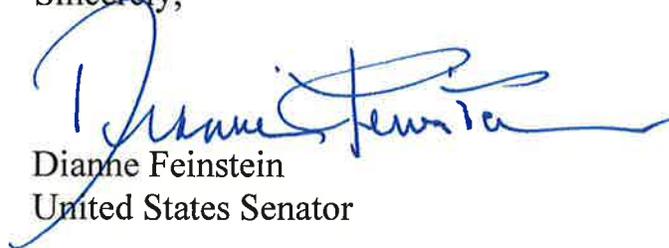
However, troubling reports have surfaced, such as on October 31, 2019, when the Ventura County Fire Department's aerial operations to contain the Maria Fire had to be halted when a drone was spotted in the immediate airspace. This is not the first reported incident of this nature, and such incidents will likely continue until the Department acts quickly to deter such actions through increased enforcement of current law prohibiting civilian drone operations in active wildfire areas.

In response to previous drone incursions into airspace near wildfires, Congress included a provision in the *Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018* authorizing the Department to prosecute individuals if they interfere, either knowingly or recklessly, with emergency response efforts regarding wildfire suppression.

However, despite continued drone interference with critical firefighting operations, it is my understanding that the Department has yet to use this new legal authority to address the problem. I ask that the Department begin using its new authority as quickly as possible so that lives are not endangered by drone interference with firefighting efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Rishi Sahgal in my office at rishi_sahgal@feinstein.senate.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

CC: Administrator Steve Dickson, Federal Aviation Administration

DF:ab