

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 16, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write to thank the Department of Defense for the continued support it has provided firefighters in battling wildfires around the country, and to request that these efforts be expanded and extended until December 31, 2022. Unfortunately, the FireGuard program is scheduled to end in two months, and its ending brings new dangers to firefighters on the front lines. As we enter the 2021 wildfire season in California and its potential to be even worse than the 2020 fire season, we believe the Department's unique capabilities, especially those of the FireGuard program, will help to combat these increasingly devastating wildfires.


We appreciate that the Department extended its assistance to firefighters through the FireGuard program from December 15th, 2020 to September 30th, 2021; however we believe that the Department must extend this program. During the 2020 fire season, the FireGuard program produced invaluable reports that provided early detections of fires and gave firefighters, as well as state and local agencies, the ability to assess the situation on the ground, which helped save lives and property. With fire seasons lasting longer and growing more dangerous each year due to climate change, ending the program in the middle of this year's fire season could be devastating to state and local firefighting efforts, and potentially prove costly in terms of both lives and property.


The Congress stands ready and willing to assist the Department in providing it with the proper authority and funding needed to make sure the FireGuard program and other resources provided by the agency remain available for first responders combating wildfires around the country. In the coming months, we plan to draft legislative remedies to ensure the smooth continuation of FireGuard and would welcome your participation and collaboration. As we continue to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic hardships it has brought to state budgets, Congress and the Department have an opportunity to work together.

It is becoming increasingly clear that wildfires will only get worse due to climate change and the extreme weather it brings. States and local governments will continue to struggle as the resources to combat these fires become more onerous. By extending the FireGuard program, the Department will help states continue to utilize this invaluable asset without the fear of losing this resource in the fight against wildfires.

Thank you and we look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,


ADAM B. SCHIFF
Member of Congress


DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator


ALEX PADILLA
United States Senator


SALUD CARBAJAL
Member of Congress


JIMMY PANETTA
Member of Congress

PETE AGUILAR
Member of Congress

JIMMY GOMEZ
Member of Congress

SCOTT PETERS
Member of Congress

NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN
Member of Congress

JARED HUFFMAN
Member of Congress

KATIE PORTER
Member of Congress

AMI BERA
Member of Congress

SARA JACOBS
Member of Congress

LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ
Member of Congress

JULIA BROWNLEY
Member of Congress

BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress

JUDY CHU
Member of Congress

TED LIEU
Member of Congress

JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress

JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress

ERIC SWALWELL
Member of Congress

MARK DESAULNIER
Member of Congress

ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress

MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress

ANNA G. ESHOO
Member of Congress

JERRY MCNERNEY
Member of Congress

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress

GRACE F. NAPOLITANO
Member of Congress

JUAN C. VARGAS
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Randy Moore, Chief of U.S. Forest Service
The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of Interior