



September 13, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Members Wicker and Smith,

On behalf of the Coalition for National Security Research ([CNSR](#)), a 100-member-plus coalition of industry, academia, scientific and professional associations, and non-profits, we write to thank you for your support for the Defense Science and Technology (S&T) program in the fiscal year (FY) 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which sets authorized funding levels for the 6.1-6.3 program elements and establishes or modifies S&T policy. With this letter, we aim to summarize CNSR's perspective on the provisions in the House-passed and Senate-introduced NDAA's (H.R. 8070 and S. 4638) that most directly impact our membership organizations and their relationships with the Department of Defense (DoD).

Efforts to Improve DoD's Innovation Ecosystem

HASC and SASC have both included several provisions in their versions of the NDAA that aim to improve DoD's innovation ecosystem. CNSR members represent the researchers who work at DoD laboratories, receive extramural grants from each of the Services and the Office of the Secretary (OSD), and contract with DoD components. The research we conduct spans the full range of S&T disciplines and serves as the driving force behind the transformative innovations that ultimately benefit our warfighters. Importantly, this ecosystem relies not only on mission-focused applied research, but also on the curiosity-driven basic science that has historically been the wellspring of breakthrough discoveries.

Among the provisions we are hopeful will support DoD's innovation ecosystem:

- **Access to Shared Classified Infrastructure** (H.R. 8070, Sec. 865; S. 4638, Sec. 1547): CNSR notes that both the House and Senate propose to establish and/or expand mechanisms for institutions of higher education and other "nontraditional defense contractors" to access shared classified commercial infrastructure. Such a program would expand opportunities for CNSR members to engage in classified research contracts. **We support the provision.**
- **Report on Basic Research Expenditures** (S. 4638, Sec. 534; H.R. 8070, item of special interest): we're pleased that both H.R. 8070 and S. 4638 request a report on the obligation and expenditure rates for DoD basic and applied research that is conducted at institutes of higher education. We agree with the Senate report that notes DoD's "expenditures benchmark policies are based on a one-size-fits-all model" and there is a "mismatch" between DoD's calendar and the

academic calendar. We are hopeful this report will detail the mismatch and identify possible solutions. **We support this report request.**

- **DoD's biotechnology research** (H.R. 8070, Sec. 243; S. 4638, Sec. 237): we are pleased to see policymakers direct DoD to develop a roadmap to guide efforts relating to biotechnology. Of the two versions, **CNSR prefers the Senate language**, which includes the additional requirements that the roadmap will “identify and guide investment priorities, plan for transition into fielded capabilities, and determine workforce needs, among other issues.”
- **AI for biotechnology applications** (H.R. 8070, Sec. 241; S. 4638, Sec. 236): we are intrigued by efforts to push DoD to support AI for biotechnology applications. The House provision would require a plan for establishing a secure computing and data storage environment to facilitate the testing of artificial intelligence models trained on biological data and the development and testing of products generated by such models. The Senate provision would require DoD to establish a pilot program focused on the development of near-term use cases and demonstrations of AI toward biotechnology applications for national security. **CNSR supports both provisions.**
- **AI Workforce** (S. 4638, Sec. 231): we agree with the Senate on the importance of fully defining, identifying, and planning for the AI workforce. CNSR members are primed to support DoD's efforts to meet their workforce needs of today and tomorrow. However, in order to meet the workforce demand, DoD must first define that demand. **CNSR supports this provision** and looks forward to working with DoD and Congress to ensure the U.S. have the AI-capable workforce it needs.
- **AI Applications at DoD**: we note that both H.R. 8070 and S. 4638 include several provisions related to AI applications at DoD. Much of the innovation that has resulted in this groundswell of AI technology originated as curiosity-driven research in labs across the country, and we are thrilled to see such interest in the implementation of these technologies. We are grateful policymakers are exercising both enthusiasm and caution when it comes to AI applications at DoD. We remind policymakers that the community is still innovating new and improved AI applications and **urge Congress to continue supporting the 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 program elements that are supporting that work.**
- **R&D Funding Disclosure Requirements** (H.R. 8070, Sec. 227): we are concerned with the detailed unfunded mandates in this section related to describing the percentage and dollar amount of federal funds and the percentage and dollar amount of nongovernmental funds supporting each R&D project when issuing a statement or press release among others. It appears this mandate could apply to making social media posts. Ultimately, section 227 will add unnecessary administrative burdens and slow the pace of R&D. **CNSR opposes this provision.**

Support for Basic Research Funding

We appreciate the bill's intention to bolster DoD's innovation ecosystem and agree it is important to find ways to facilitate the transition of new technologies to the warfighter. However, **we would caution against overlooking the crucial role that curiosity-driven research has played in sustaining the long-term health and vitality of this ecosystem.**

While the rapid transition of innovative technologies to the warfighter is valuable, it is essential that Congress also recognizes the enduring importance of basic scientific research. Even when the direct application to the warfighter may not be immediately apparent, foundational, curiosity-driven research has historically been the wellspring from which many transformative innovations have emerged. Maintaining a balanced approach that supports both mission-oriented applied research and open-ended basic science will be critical to ensuring the continued strength and resilience of the DoD's innovation capabilities.

Addressing Civil Rights Violations

S. 4638, Sec. 220 would prohibit DoD from awarding research and development contracts or grants to educational institutions that have violated certain civil rights. We recognize the concerns that have prompted the proposed provision. However, we firmly believe this specific provision is unnecessary and sets an alarming precedent. The Department of Education is the appropriate authority tasked with investigating and enforcing civil rights compliance within educational institutions. Requiring DoD to take on this additional responsibility of civil rights enforcement does not align with their core mission and expertise. **We urge you to reconsider this provision**, as it would create unnecessary duplication of efforts and may undermine the established processes for addressing civil rights issues in the education sector.

Scientific and Technical Workforce

Understanding that the Senate has not had the opportunity to consider its bill on the floor, there are two amendments related to DoD's scientific and technical workforce that CNSR supports:

- **Admission of Essential Scientists and Technical Experts to Promote and Protect National Security Innovation Base** ([2599 Warner](#)) Would allow a limited number of experts to access special immigrant status if they support the national security innovation base.
- **Public-private talent exchanges for the Intelligence Community** ([3209 Warner](#), the Senate Intelligence Authorization Act, Sec. 508) Would add fields to the list of "focus areas" that are eligible for a public-private exchange and extend the allowed duration of the temporary assignment.

Miscellaneous Items

In an effort to limit the length of this letter but still express CNSR's support for key provisions in the House and Senate bills, the coalition is supportive of the following provisions being included in the FY 2025 NDAA conference agreement:

- H.R. 8070, Sec. 213. Modification to Defense Laboratory education partnerships
- H.R. 8070, Sec. 2802. Assistance for public infrastructure projects and services
- H.R. 8070, Sec. 2804. Expansion of eligible grant recipients under the Defense Community Infrastructure Program
- S. 4638, Sec. 248. Pilot program on establishing entities and consortia to conduct prototyping and production of critical and emerging technologies
- S. 4638, Sec. 312. Initiative to control and combat the spread of invasive species
- S. 4638, Sec. 1541. Defense Industrial Base workforce development strategy
- S. 4638, Sec. 1545. Pilot program on establishing a geospatial workforce development program

Thank you for your prior commitments to a robust Defense S&T program; we hope that commitment will continue in the coming year. Please do not hesitate to contact us if CNSR can be of any service as the FY 2025 NDAA process advances.

Sincerely,

John Latini & Heather Bloemhard
Co-Chairs