

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 3, 2024

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Collins,

We write to respectfully request your continued support for the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD's) Humanitarian Demining Research and Development (HD R&D) Program, implemented by the U.S. Army. The HD R&D Program specializes in developing and testing innovative technologies to detect and clear landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These technologies increase the effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of demining operations for military and humanitarian use—saving lives and taxpayer dollars.

The HD R&D team designs technologies to respond to technical challenges in the field, drawing from new commercial technology, equipment currently in use by the DOD, and advanced sensor technology available only through other DOD R&D programs. They then trial prototypes in real field conditions through partnerships with the Department of State's (DOS's) humanitarian demining programs. During field evaluations, operators provide feedback on the functionality and effectiveness of the equipment. This allows HD R&D to modify and improve the equipment and increase the United States technical capacity to respond to explosive threats.

HD R&D produces three specific outcomes. First, the field evaluation cycle collects enormous amounts of data helping to improve detection technologies used by our soldiers. Second, successfully trialed equipment is used to train and equip explosive disposal units of allied militaries. By equipping partner militaries to handle their own explosive threats, U.S. soldiers are more likely to remain out of harm's way. Third, HD R&D equipment amplifies taxpayer value for money by increasing the amount of clearance performed on DOS projects without increasing costs.

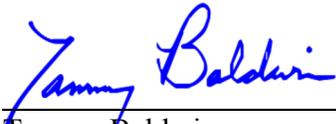
The HD R&D Program has a track record of success, having performed over 250 operational field evaluations in 44 countries since 1995. The program is responsible for developing advanced technology for the Handheld Standoff Mine Detection System, which combines metal detection with ground penetrating radar, the rotary mine comb, designed to efficiently excavate low metal content anti-vehicle mines, and TRAXX, built to cut through hard-to-see tripwires and lift mines from soil. Overall, HD R&D equipment has been used to clear more than 26,600 acres of land, and to destroy more than 420,000 mines and UXO. HD R&D receives funding from Research, Development, Test & Evaluation, Army / Program Element 0603920A.

Due to strong bipartisan support, the FY24 minibus appropriations bill included \$23.068 million for humanitarian demining—a program increase of \$2.068 million over FY23 enacted and \$14 million over the FY24 President’s Budget request. However, this program has a long list of unfunded projects, including drone technology in the Solomon Islands and Angola and counter-IED machines in Iraq and Libya. The HD R&D program also requires resources to address the heavy contamination and varied threat types across Ukraine, where the program is beginning to evaluate advanced attachments to currently utilized equipment and U.S.-manufactured remote demining robots.

We urge the committee to support funding at a level of \$25 million in Fiscal Year 2025 for HD R&D. This additional funding will improve the ability of U.S. soldiers and our allies/partners to safely detect and clear landmines, UXO, and IEDs, as well as protect civilian lives. This funding is especially important as new conflicts uncover new threats in areas like the Ukraine, the Middle East, and Libya.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you throughout the appropriations process to save many military and civilian lives.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



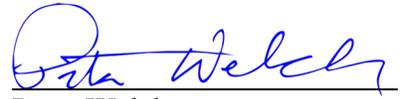
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



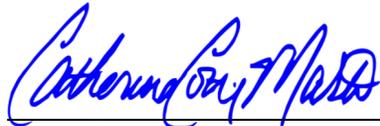
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United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
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Peter Welch
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Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



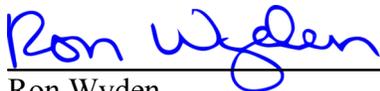
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Richard Blumenthal
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Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
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Alex Padilla
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Raphael G. Butler
United States Senator



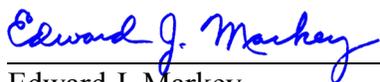
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United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



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United States Senator



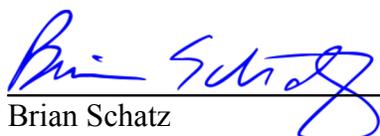
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United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator