

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20510

June 18, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-100

Dear Secretary Austin:

The Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (FY23 NDAA) included language requesting a report from your office on the feasibility, advisability, and potential benefits of initiating the security clearance process for qualified students enrolled in Department of Defense (DoD) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs. This report was due to the House Armed Services Committee on January 1, 2023. We write to urge the expeditious completion and transmission of this report to Congress.

As noted in the FY23 NDAA, there is an increasing need within DoD and the broader Defense Industrial Base for new employees with STEM expertise. The Department of Defense manages STEM programs, federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) programs, and university affiliated research center (UARC) programs in which undergraduate and graduate students participate. This population of students represents a well-qualified pool of applicants who have demonstrated technological skills, a commitment to public service, and an interest in continuing their work in national security-related fields.

The security clearance process—a key requirement for such employment opportunities—suffers from long backlogs in processing and investigations, which risks pushing students to pursue employment outside of the national security sector. We continue to hear concerns from defense and aerospace companies with facilities both in Colorado and across the country about the challenges of recruiting and retaining properly cleared staff.

We believe initiating the security clearance process for students enrolled in DoD STEM programs may help address these challenges while advancing the Department's own goals of meeting its growing demand for a talented and diverse STEM workforce. We look forward to receiving the requested report as soon as possible and working with your office to maintain and expand our defense and national security workforce.

Sincerely,



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Jason Crow
United States Representative