

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 22, 2019

Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave NW, Nebraska Avenue Complex
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

We write to request information regarding the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to address election security. Given clear warnings from Intelligence Community officials that the 2020 presidential election remains a target for our adversaries, it is vital that we take strong action now in order to ensure our systems are secure on Election Day.

Intelligence Community officials have clearly indicated that U.S. elections continue to be at risk of foreign influence and interference. Last year, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a joint statement of concern about "ongoing campaigns" by foreign actors, including Russia, China, and Iran, to "undermine confidence in democratic institutions."¹ Specifically, the joint statement noted "ongoing and persistent threats to election infrastructure [were detected]. Some state and local governments have reported attempts to access their networks, which often include online voter registration databases..."²

On January 29, leaders from our intelligence agencies testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that adversaries targeted the midterm elections with sophisticated misinformation campaigns, and that cyber threats to our critical infrastructure remain a top concern.³ They explained, "We expect our adversaries and strategic competitors to refine their capabilities and add new tactics as they learn from each other's experiences, suggesting the threat landscape could look very different in 2020 and future elections."⁴

These warnings follow Russia's significant efforts to maliciously interfere with the 2016 election—including hacking into the computer networks of campaign organizations and orchestrating a month-long cyber-attack on the Illinois State Board of Elections. In the wake of the 2016 election and the designation of election infrastructure as a critical infrastructure subsector, DHS prioritized election security and made significant progress working to enhance it

¹ Joint Statement from the ODNI, DOJ, FBI and DHS: Combating Foreign Influence in U.S. Elections. (2018, October 19). <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/1915-joint-statement-from-the-odni-doj-fbi-and-dhs-combating-foreign-influence-in-u-s-elections>

² Ibid

³ U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Hearing on Worldwide Threat Assessment. Coates, D., Wray, C., Haspel, G., Ashley, R., Nakasone, P., and Cardillo, R. (2019, January 29). <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/open-hearingworldwide-threats>

⁴ Coates, D. R. (2019, January 29). Testimony before Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on Worldwide Threat Assessment. <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-dcoats-012919.pdf>

by coordinating with election officials.⁵ Among the many important steps DHS implemented to fortify the nation's election infrastructure, the Department created election security task forces focused on working with the public and private sectors on this issue.⁶ We strongly support the work of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Director Chris Krebs and applaud the important strides that have been made to provide state election officials and other key stakeholders with information and resources vital to securing our elections. These efforts have made our democracy stronger, but we need to further bolster our election infrastructure ahead of 2020, which is why Congress recently provided the Department with an additional \$33 million in election security funding.

In order to better understand how DHS is working to strengthen election security ahead of the 2020 election, we respectfully ask you to provide us with the following information by March 1, 2019:

1. Recent reports allege that CISA has deprioritized election security by reducing the capacity of the election security task forces. At its peak, how many personnel were assigned to the task forces at CISA before the 2018 election and how many are assigned to the task forces presently?
2. Prior to the 2018 election, what was the chain of command for the task forces within the Department? Is that reporting structure presently in place? If not, please describe the current reporting structure.
3. Please discuss initiatives occurring across DHS on election security, including the election security and resilience work the National Risk Management Center (NRMC) is conducting.⁷ How is the NRMC election security line of effort different than the work the task forces perform?
4. Has CISA documented what occurred during the 2018 election and lessons learned that can be used to inform the Department's and the broader government's 2020 posture? If so, please provide those documents.
5. Director Krebs publicly noted that CISA is in the process of hiring additional election security personnel.⁸ How many additional staff will be hired and for what positions? When will these staff be in place? What are CISA's plans for ensuring these new election security personnel are brought up to speed with previous task force work, given the changes to the task forces?

⁵ Statement by Secretary Johnson on the Designation of Election Infrastructure as a Critical Infrastructure Subsector. Department of Homeland Security News Archive (2017, January 6). <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/01/06/statement-secretary-johnson-designation-election-infrastructure-critical>

⁶ Marks, J. (2017, October 03). *DHS Forms Election Security Task Force*. <https://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2017/10/dhs-forms-election-security-task-force/141497/>

⁷ *National Risk Management Center 100 Days Fact Sheet*. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/NRMC_100_Days_Fact_Sheet_20181115CISA.pdf

⁸ Ng, A. (2019, February 14). Homeland Security says it's 'doubling down' on 2020 election security efforts. <https://www.cnet.com/news/homeland-security-says-its-doubling-down-election-security-efforts-for-2020/>

6. What other steps is DHS taking to increase its capacity to adequately address threats associated with the 2020 elections?
7. Since 2016, DHS established communication and coordination lines with other government agencies, state and local election officials, and private sector stakeholders. Given reports of drastic staff changes, what steps is the Department taking to maintain and enhance those efforts and relationships to ensure that no institutional memory is lost?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Cc: Senator Ron Johnson, Chairman Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Senator Roy Blunt, Chairman Senate Rules and Administration Committee