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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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May 12, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President,

I am concerned about recent reported Chinese government sponsored cyber-attacks against the United States and I urge you to take necessary action to mitigate this threat in the future.

The Chinese government has reportedly sponsored attacks against the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), hospitals, research laboratories, health care providers, and pharmaceutical companies with the goal of stealing COVID-19 treatment and vaccine research. By targeting hospitals and health care providers, these state-sponsored hackers put the lives of Americans who are seeking care at risk.

In a March 6, 2019 hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, I raised concerns that the federal government has failed to invest effectively in cybersecurity protections and warned that past breaches have shown the severe consequences of inadequate cybersecurity investments. HHS manages massive quantities of sensitive medical research and personal data. Continued cybersecurity deficiencies in our government systems are inexcusable and require immediate attention and additional resources.

We should also work to improve the security of state, local, and private sector institutions that are researching COVID-19. Given the life and death consequences of information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) should prioritize their cybersecurity support to safeguard our health care sector.

Finally, the United States must communicate a strong message to China's government that this behavior is unacceptable. The Administration should use public pressure and the threat of sanctions and additional indictments to deter future Chinese government attacks against research institutions. In the event China's government directly threatens the lives of Americans through actions against hospitals, other Department of Defense capabilities should be considered to make it clear that there will be consequences for these actions.

The Honorable Donald J. Trump

May 12, 2020

Page 2

I urge you to take all necessary measures to protect government and private sector medical institutions working to save lives and develop treatments and a vaccine for COVID-19. These measures should include:

1. Directing CISA and CYBERCOM to prioritize cybersecurity support to hospitals and medical research institutions, including providing risk and vulnerability assessments and sharing cyber threat intelligence information with those organizations.
2. Utilizing all levers of national power – diplomatic, military, economic, and law enforcement – to deter the Chinese government from any attacks against U.S. medical institutions and make clear that any attack on our medical systems will be treated as a significant threat to our country.
3. Increasing cybersecurity funding as part of future COVID-19 funding requests to Congress for hospitals, medical and research institutions.
4. Directing Secretary Azar to prioritize HHS information technology appropriations towards improvements in cybersecurity, and encouraging the Secretary to work with GAO and the HHS Inspector General to improve its cybersecurity posture.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs