

June 12, 2023

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
2469 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
2264 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

We, a diverse group of organizations spanning the ideological spectrum, write to urge you to include in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) a provision to repeal the statutory requirements for unfunded priority lists (UPLs).

Military services, combatant commands, and other military components are currently required by congressional mandate to produce these wish lists, which include funding requests for programs outside the formal budget process. Accordingly, there is no requirement for military services, commands, or other components to outline the long-term costs of wish list requests, much less their strategic value.¹ These wish lists subvert the formal budgetary process and unnecessarily increase Pentagon spending.²

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin publicly announced his support for repealing UPL requirements during a congressional hearing in March.³ Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord also sent a letter to Congress on behalf of the Secretary, writing that “The current statutory practice of having multiple individual senior leaders submit priorities for additional funding absent the benefit of weighing costs and benefits across the department is not an effective way to illuminate our top joint priorities.”⁴

¹ Senators Elizabeth Warren, Mike Braun, Mike Lee, and Angus King, “Streamline Pentagon Spending Act,” December 15, 2022, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/warren-braun-lee-king-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-reduce-wasteful-pentagon-spending-repeal-unfunded-priorities-list>.

² Elizabeth Warren, senator, to Lloyd Austin, secretary of defense, about unfunded priorities lists, December 5, 2022, 2, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2022.12.05%20Letter%20to%20Austin%20on%20Excessive%20Unfunded%20Priorities%20Lists1.pdf>.

³ Connor Echols, “SecDef Austin calls on Congress to end wasteful ‘wish list’ gimmick,” *Responsible Statecraft*, March 28, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/03/28/secdef-austin-calls-on-congress-to-end-wasteful-wish-list-gimmick/>.

⁴ John M. Donnelly, “Pentagon comes out against law requiring military wish lists,” *Roll Call*, March 28, 2023, <https://rollcall.com/2023/03/28/pentagon-comes-out-against-law-requiring-military-wish-lists/?ref=com.devaary.cqrc.rollcall.v01>.

We could not agree more. Funding wish list requests only exacerbates the department’s existing financial mismanagement issues, especially given the massive size and scope of Pentagon wish lists.⁵ Last year, the Pentagon submitted not one, but two wish list requests valued at over \$24 billion and about \$25 billion, respectively⁶ — meaning that total wish list requests in fiscal year 2023 were more than the entire budget requests of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and Treasury, and several other federal agencies.⁷ So far this year, wish list requests total more than \$17 billion.⁸

It’s time for Congress to repeal the requirements for Pentagon wish lists. They undermine the budgetary process and increase an already ballooning military budget, making it even more difficult for the Pentagon to address longstanding financial mismanagement issues and focus on critical priorities necessary for force readiness. The Secretary of Defense agrees that the department does not need a legal mandate for unfunded priority lists. If a program is an actual defense priority, the Pentagon should have to include it in its yearly budget request.

Sincerely,

Council for a Livable World
Demand Progress Action
Friends Committee on National Legislation
National Taxpayers Union
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
Peace Action
Project On Government Oversight
Public Citizen
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
R Street Institute
Taxpayers for Common Sense
Taxpayers Protection Alliance
United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries
Win Without War

cc: The Honorable Charles Schumer, Majority Leader, United States Senate
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader, United States Senate

⁵ “Coalition Writes in Support of Bipartisan Efforts to Curb DoD ‘Wish Lists,’” National Taxpayers Union, October 11, 2022, <https://www.ntu.org/publications/detail/coalition-writes-in-support-of-bipartisan-efforts-to-curb-dod-wish-lists>.

⁶ “Coalition Writes in Support of Bipartisan Efforts to Curb DoD ‘Wish Lists,’” [see note 5]; Julia Gledhill, “The Pentagon’s second unfunded priorities list is an accountability travesty, Congress should act,” *Breaking Defense*, December 1, 2022, <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/12/the-pentagons-second-unfunded-priorities-list-is-an-accountability-travesty-congress-should-act/>.

⁷ The White House, “Budget of the U.S. Government Fiscal Year 2023,” Table S–8, March 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/budget_fy2023.pdf#page=143.

⁸ “Delisting the Pentagon’s Unfunded Priorities List,” Taxpayers for Common Sense, May 16, 2023, <https://www.taxpayer.net/national-security/delisting-the-pentagons-unfunded-priorities-list/>.

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Speaker, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Leader, United States House of
Representatives