

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Peter Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write to urge that you cease any effort to close the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence at the Department of Defense. Minimizing civilian casualties in warfare is a moral duty and a strategic imperative.

We remind you that the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence (“the Center”) was established by Congress, fully funded by Congress in each of the last two fiscal years, and the law requires you to operate it. Congress established the Center, with overwhelming bipartisan support, in 2022. Its purpose, per 10 U.S. Code § 184, is to “institutionalize and advance knowledge, practices, and tools for preventing, mitigating, and responding to civilian harm” that result “from military operations involving the United States Armed Forces.” It was established in response to an inquiry led by previous Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis into civilian casualties that resulted from U.S. airstrikes in Iraq.

Nevertheless, public reporting indicates that the Trump Administration is preparing to “abolish” the Center.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of your personal views regarding the importance of reducing civilian casualties, neither you nor the President have such authority.

Reducing civilian casualties in warfare is an obvious moral imperative necessary for its own sake. But it is also a strategic imperative. The credibility of U.S. foreign policy flows not just from our raw military power but also from our reputation as a nation that values innocent life and protects noncombatants. When American forces deploy, the world should understand that they are not just the most lethal and capable force in human history, but also that their operations are conducted consistent with the highest moral and humanitarian standards. Furthermore, U.S. forces’ freedom of maneuver and the sustainability of deployments in complex environments often depends upon the trust and good faith of the local civilian population.

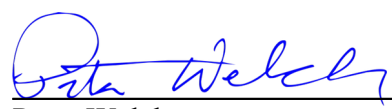
We urge you to support the work of the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence, and not to undo years of work by your predecessors to ensure the United States military remains the most capable, responsible, and respected in the world.

Sincerely,




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Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator




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Peter Welch  
United States Senator



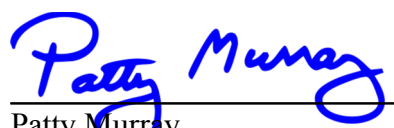
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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



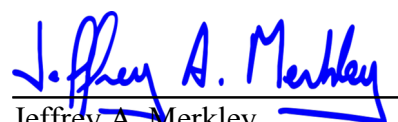
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Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator




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Patty Murray  
United States Senator




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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator  
Ranking Member, Committee  
on Budget




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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator




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Elissa Slotkin  
United States Senator



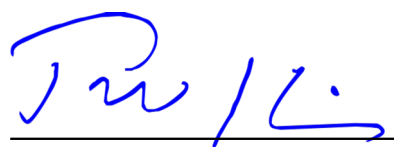
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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator




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Tina Smith  
United States Senator



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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator