

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Thomas B. Modly
Acting Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Secretary Modly:

We appreciate the steps the Navy has recently taken to ensure the stability of the nation's defense industrial base, as well as your recent phone discussion with Senator Collins on this topic. The Department's many efforts to address the concerns of these vital industry partners will likely help many suppliers remain viable during this challenging time.

As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spreads across our nation, however, we continue to be concerned about risks to the workforce that sustains the Navy's shipyard defense industrial base. In many states, such as Maine, Governors have issued orders mandating the closure of all non-essential businesses and placed restrictions on public gatherings due to the current risks to public health and safety of the deadly virus.

In response to this pandemic, the Navy earlier issued direction to each of its four public shipyards intended to limit the potential exposure of shipyard workers to COVID-19 while also maximizing the important national security work accomplished. This included the liberal use of telework, as well as permitting the most vulnerable workers to take paid administrative leave based on Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, such as older individuals or those who have preexisting health conditions, as well as those who have family members with preexisting health conditions.

We urge you to provide similar guidelines to our nation's large private shipyards, the workers at which face similar health and safety concerns, and to permit necessary contract or deadline flexibility and funding to ensure such guidance would be feasible to implement for these shipyards. We appreciate that it would ordinarily not be appropriate for the Navy to require or recommend particular workforce management policies of its private contractors. However, we are dealing with a highly contagious and deadly pandemic unlike anything our country has faced in over a century, and private shipyards are working to simultaneously maintain contractual obligations while complying with critical state and local public health orders. Therefore, we believe the Navy should take aggressive actions to ensure the health of the shipyard industrial base workforce is not put at undue risk as governments at all levels work to halt the spread of COVID-19.

Again, thank you for your attention to this important issue, and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Jared Golden
Member of Congress