United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 21, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
U.S. Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis,

The United States and our allies face increasingly complex and varied ballistic and cruise missile threats – including from rapidly-advancing Chinese and North Korean arsenals – and our nation must pursue a holistic strategy to address them.

It is for this reason I write to express my deep concern that the Department of Defense has repeatedly delayed completion and release of its ongoing Missile Defense Review (MDR) and request an update on its status. As you know, Congress mandated a review of U.S. missile defense policy and strategy in the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act and ordered it completed by January 2018. In a January 2017 Executive Order, President Trump directed the department to conduct such a review.

Over the past three decades, the United States has spent hundreds of billions of dollars pursuing both theater and homeland ballistic missile defense capabilities. In recent years, Congress has provided record appropriations to further support missile defense-related activities. In Fiscal Year 2018, Congress approved $11.5 billion for the Missile Defense Agency, an increase of $3.6 billion, or 46 percent, from the Trump administration's May 2017 initial budget request. The appropriation is the largest Congress has ever provided for the agency after adjusting for inflation.

However, America's pursuit of these capabilities also has spurred debate about the efficacy and cost effectiveness of various missile defense technologies. We also must consider any negative repercussions of developing certain types of missile defenses on strategic stability, as inadvertently undermining deterrence relationships can increase the likelihood of devastating nuclear conflict. This debate is likely to intensify as our adversaries further advance their ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, we develop increasingly sophisticated missile defenses in an attempt to counter them, and both we and they look to new frontiers, such as outer space, in pursuit of military advantage.

That is why it is imperative that the Pentagon's MDR be completed and released to Congress and the American public as soon as possible. The review is already six months overdue, and its ongoing delay deprives Congress of an important tool in considering these important questions and funding levels for missile defense programs. Indeed, the need for a completed MDR is all the more important in light of recent, concerning comments by Defense Department officials indicating the Pentagon is amenable to considering major changes in U.S. missile defense policy, including pursuing development and fielding of space-based missile defense interceptors.

Given this, I respectfully request an explanation for why the MDR's completion and release continues to be delayed and urge you to move as quickly as possible to complete this review.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey