

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 18, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Defense Subcommittee
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Ranking Member
Defense Subcommittee
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Durbin:

The *Ohio*-class strategic ballistic missile submarine fleet is our nation's most survivable leg of the nuclear triad safeguarding our national security. This fleet is rapidly approaching the end of its useable life, leaving efforts to sustain our nuclear deterrence at a crucial juncture. As such, replacing the 14 *Ohio*-class submarines with 12 new strategic ballistic missile submarines through the *Ohio*-class Replacement Program (ORP) remains paramount to national security.

ORP is on schedule, but will reach a critical transition point in the coming months. To begin the transition of ORP from research and development into procurement, the Navy requested \$773.1 million in shipbuilding funding for fiscal year 2017 – the first year of such funding. The Navy has testified that this funding is critical to maintaining the program's already tight schedule. The nation has previously accepted risk by delaying ORP construction when the Navy delayed the program in 2013. Any further postponement will prevent the Navy from meeting STRATCOM requirements for conducting the first ORP strategic deterrent patrol in fiscal year 2031. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Richardson noted in September 2016 at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that there is no further margin for delay in ORP. He testified, "If we cannot find a way to begin this [detailed design] work by the beginning of the calendar year, ORP will almost certainly experience unnecessary cost growth, as well as experience delays that threaten the conduct of an existential mission that we have covered continuously since 1960."

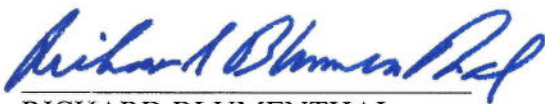
With an uncertain path forward for the fiscal year 2017 appropriations process, we urge you to take action to keep the Navy's top modernization program on track to maintain delivery schedules and avoid program costs increases. Absent a special anomaly in any continuing resolution (CR), the Navy would be precluded from spending the shipbuilding funding for ORP, since the shipbuilding funding would be treated as a new start. As you review funding priorities in the waning days of the 114th Congress, we urge you to include ORP in any anomalies list in the event that we are faced with funding the Department of Defense through another CR for 2017.

Ensuring ORP remains on schedule is also important to the shipbuilding workforce of highly skilled workers spanning multiple states. In fact, the shipyard cut steel for the hull plate of the first ORP boat in August 2016. The contractor team has also begun construction of several

missile tubes and has placed material orders with over 320 suppliers nationwide. Unless the Congress provides (1) the first year of ORP funding provided through a defense appropriations bill, or (2) an anomaly in a CR, the Navy and contractor team would have to cut up to 2,300 jobs from the engineering, design, and support staff across Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Virginia. This would result in the loss of an indispensable knowledge base and critical skills that cannot be rebuilt without incurring considerable cost, schedule delay, and technical risk. Therefore, we must do everything we can to ensure ORP remains on schedule.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to working with you on this critical national security issue.

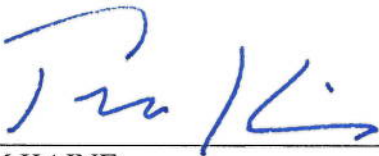
Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



JACK REED
United States Senate



TIM Kaine
United States Senate



MARK R. WARNER
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate



SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senate