

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2024

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
1200 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Admiral Lisa Franchetti
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Secretary Del Toro and Admiral Franchetti:

We write regarding the Department of Navy (DoN)'s recently announced review of civilian workforce position classifications across the four public shipyards. As members of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense who also represent public shipyards and their workforce, we are concerned that this review runs contrary to the Navy's stated goals of eliminating submarine maintenance backlogs. While we understand this review is required under federal regulation¹, we urge DoN's Office of Civilian Human Resources (OCHR) to engage with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to minimize potential negative effects this review may have on the Navy's civilian workforce and U.S. national security.

Today's security environment requires the United States to have a combat-credible undersea fleet to maintain a competitive edge over our adversaries. The overwhelming production capacity of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia's steady production progress toward fifth-generation submarines², and growing cooperation between these authoritarian regimes will create additional demands on the U.S. submarine force. Meanwhile, the U.S. submarine industrial base continues to face maintenance shortfalls at our four public shipyards that affect the Navy's ability to get boats back into the fleet on time³. Reducing these maintenance backlogs is contingent on a robust, well-trained shipyard workforce.

U.S. public shipyards over the last decade have aggressively hired engineers, trades professionals, and other support staff to support increased Navy workload requirements. During this time, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY)'s workforce demands have grown by 50 percent, and the yard has added more than 2,000 new jobs. With hundreds of employees leaving PNSY over the past six years, active recruiting efforts are paramount to increasing the workforce to meet these demands.

¹ 5 CFR 511.612

² <https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2024/03/28/sevmash-completes-upgrades-to-build-russias-next-gen-nuclear-sub/>


³ "In May [2023], the Navy had twice as many attack submarines tied up in maintenance than it should have according to its own plans, due to delays at public and private yards conducting maintenance and modernization work." - <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2023/11/07/navys-sub-readiness-boss-unveils-steps-to-reach-on-time-maintenance/>

Should OCHR's review result in position description demotions and salary decreases for a significant population of technical professionals, it would cripple efforts to staff and support the needs of the Navy. We, therefore, ask for your support in protecting our shipyard employees by reconsidering OCHR's directive and by engaging with OPM to find a position that both maintains the integrity of the Federal and Department of Navy Classification Programs while protecting the wages and benefits of our valued workforce. Additionally, we request your response to the following questions:


1. How many civilian positions are subject to OCHR's review? Specifically, how many positions at each public shipyard will be reviewed?
2. How did OCHR determine the position descriptions that would be subject to this review in accordance with the requirements in 5 CFR 511.612?
3. Should this review result in demotions of position descriptions, what authorities does DoN have to mitigate the effect this would have on workers?
4. What actions is the Navy prepared to take to address the potential negative effects downgrading position descriptions may have on workforce recruiting and retention?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator