

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 07, 2020

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 2051


Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Thornberry,

As you continue your crucial work on this year's National Defense Authorization Act, we write to express our concerns with the United States Air Force's plan for its C-130H aircraft and to support your Committee's mark for the overall C-130 fleet. We urge caution, as the Air Force appears to continue its reduction of Air National Guard (ANG) units before adequately explaining its long-term plan for the C-130H fleet.

For FY21, the Air Force proposed to reduce the C-130 fleet from 300 to 287. The difference—all 13 aircraft—would come from the ANG; but whereas eight older H-models would wisely be recapitalized with eight newer J-models, five different ANG units would also each divest a Backup Inventory Aircraft (BAI). This is unsustainable. Units have already been reduced from a dozen aircraft to seven primary aircraft with one BAI. The Air Force proposes to continue a reduction in units by stripping the BAI away, despite the units relying on that BAI to generate sorties necessary to maintain combat proficiency. Insisting that units now prepare for the same deployment requirements (without BAI) risks mission readiness, as 100% maintenance availability is rare with newer aircraft, let alone older H-models. Therefore, we support your Committee's mark for a 292-aircraft C-130 fleet, as that would account for much needed recapitalization, without stripping units of the aircraft they need to train properly.

Further, the most recent Mobility Capabilities and Requirements Study found a need to maintain 300 theater airlift aircraft to meet requirements. Nevertheless, the Air Force proposes to assume the risk of a smaller theater airlift fleet and has not provided sufficient justification. Any reduction in crucial capabilities should be the result of informed decision making. Therefore, we ask that the Committee continue to require the Air Force to provide its data-driven reasoning for a smaller C-130 fleet, and to provide a sustainable, long-term fleet management plan. The hardworking men and women of our ANG units deserve consistency. We look forward to working with you on other ways to manage the C-130H fleet responsibly.

Sincerely,



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



Darin LaHood
Member of Congress

List of Signatories

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Darin LaHood
Mark Amodei
Ilhan Omar
Troy Balderson
Greg Gianforte