

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 29, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

On July 10, you issued an order to ramp up the Department of Defense's drone production. We believe in the importance of drones for the future of warfare, and we agree this order is needed to supercharge the Pentagon's drone capabilities and make sure the United States can compete with China. As part of this push, you directed DoD to establish three new unmanned aerial system (UAS) national test sites within 90 days. We urge you to designate the National All-Domain Warfighting Center (NADWC) in Michigan as one of these sites.

NADWC has a unique combination of capabilities, permissive drone testing policies, cost-effectiveness, and proximity to private sector innovators that will supercharge drone testing for the Pentagon and maximize drone training opportunities for warfighters.

- NADWC already has a track record of success for drone testing and innovation. It serves as (1) a drone testing site for both the Pentagon and defense contractors as part of the annual Exercise Northern Strike, (2) as a commercial drone testing site on a regular basis, and (3) as home to a dedicated sixty-mile-long and six-mile-wide drone corridor beginning later this year.
- Michigan is also a national leader in drone innovation. This past May, NADWC hosted the first Uncrewed Triple Challenge, an Ironman race that tests drones' capabilities across air, land, and sea. The first-of-its-kind, public-private event gave DoD and the National Guard a live testbed for evaluating cutting-edge uncrewed systems for multi-domain autonomous battlefield supply.
- On July 17, Michigan became the first state to act on President Trump's recent drone executive orders as Governor Whitmer signed an executive directive establishing the Advanced Air Mobility Initiative as a whole-of-government strategy to scale Michigan's drone capabilities and utilization.

NADWC's all-domain capability, large size, expansive special use airspace, and all-weather training environment offers warfighters the ability to test drones at scale under a wide range of battlefield conditions year-round, including for live fire, combined arms, swarm testing.

- NADWC is the largest joint training range in the United States east of the Mississippi River and host of Exercise Northern Strike, the largest reserve forces exercise in the country. It spans nearly 150,000 acres of training space and 17,000 square miles of contiguous special use military airspace that extends over Lake Huron up to 50,000 mean sea level.
- NADWC offers year-round, all-weather drone training in all five warfighting domains (land, air, maritime, cyber, and space) to pressure test the full range of battlefield scenarios, including air-to-air maneuvers, contested command and control, maritime and littoral combat operations, and long-range precision strikes.

NADWC's permissive drone testing policies, range and spectrum availability, and status as a National Guard base make it a cost-effective, readily available hot bed for military and dual-use drone testing.

- Unlike active-duty bases, each of Michigan's National Guard bases allows companies to rent space on site and provides open access to industry partners to use military training ranges for commercial drone testing.

- NADWC also provides greater and more frequent range availability for public and private stakeholders to test drones at a fraction of the cost and wait time as other comparable training ranges.
- Its location in northern Michigan and over Lake Huron, the nation's second largest lake, offers a clean electromagnetic spectrum training environment for drones, with up to 6,000 frequencies and 4,000 miles of fiber on the Merit Cyber Range available for military use.

NADWC's proximity to large-scale manufacturing centers, private sector drone innovators, venture financing, and national transportation hubs make it a centrally located, all-in-one destination to anchor DoD's drone ecosystem.

- NADWC will give DoD ready access to Michigan drone companies, many already working with DoD; one of the largest 3D printing networks in the country; and a venture capital and technology incubator network with more than 100 startups in Michigan focused on dual-use critical capabilities like drones and their enabling technologies.
- Close access to this ecosystem will enable DoD to close the gap between prototyping and fielding drones all in one place by testing at NADWC and harnessing the mass-manufacturing capacity, expertise, and workforce honed over decades across Michigan.

Because of these advantages, NADWC already has a track record of success as a drone testing ground for both DoD and the private sector, and Michigan is leading the nation on drone testing and innovation. For all these reasons, we urge you to designate NADWC as a national UAS test site. Michigan is ready to lead DoD's efforts to usher in a drone revolution and be a partner in testing and manufacturing drones for our military.

Sincerely,



Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



Gary Peters
United States Senator



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Tom Barrett
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



John James
Member of Congress

Kristen McDonald Rivet

Kristen McDonald Rivet
Member of Congress



John Moolenaar
Member of Congress



Hillary Scholten
Member of Congress



Haley Stevens
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress

CC:

HON Daniel Driscoll, Secretary of the Army

HON John Phelan, Secretary of the Navy

HON Troy Meink, Secretary of the Air Force

General Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

HON Michael Duffey, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment

HON Emil Michael, Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering