

January 13, 2025

Senator John Thune  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Roger Wicker  
Chairman  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders Thune and Schumer, Chairman Wicker, and Ranking Member Reed,

We write to express our opposition to Trump’s nominee for the Department of Defense, Pete Hegseth, who is wholly unfit to lead this agency. As the Secretary of Defense, Hegseth would be responsible for the health, safety, and well-being of millions of military service members, civilian personnel, and dependents. But his record shows that he poses a clear threat to women, LGBTQI+ people, and people of color – all of whom are a critical part of our all-volunteer military and veteran communities.<sup>1</sup>

Hegseth’s demonstrated history of misogyny, harassment, and alleged sexual assault make him an unacceptable candidate for Secretary of Defense, and indeed for any leadership position in our federal government. In 2017, Hegseth was credibly accused of sexually assaulting a staffer at a convention where he was delivering a keynote address. The staffer told police investigators that Hegseth took her phone and blocked her from leaving a hotel room before assaulting her. Hegseth later entered into a confidential settlement with the staffer, barring her from further speaking out about what happened, and has recently threatened to sue her for coming forward. Hegseth’s complicity with predatory behavior towards women has been widely-reported, and under his leadership of a veterans’ organization, employees reported that the organization ignored allegations of sexual misconduct, including assault, and subjected women to retaliation for reporting their male colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> We note the importance of conducting the FBI background check and any other required forms. To our knowledge this process has not yet been completed for Hegseth, but is key to the ability to properly vet nominees and fundamental for maintaining the integrity of our government.

<sup>2</sup> Mayer, Jane. “Pete Hegseth’s Secret History.” The New Yorker, 1 Dec. 2024, [www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/pete-hegseths-secret-history](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/pete-hegseths-secret-history).

While this reported behavior would be disqualifying for anyone nominated for a position of public trust and responsibility, Hegseth's problematic history with regard to sexual assault and harassment is particularly egregious for the role of Secretary of Defense. The military faces a sexual assault epidemic, with approximately 29,000 service members indicating they had experienced unwanted sexual contact in fiscal year 2023 (including almost 7 percent of women in active duty) and 8,515 sexual assault reports filed.<sup>3</sup> Only recently has the Department of Defense begun to seriously address sexual assault and harassment and their perpetuation through military culture. If Hegseth is appointed, he will be charged with implementing the Uniform Code of Military Justice and prosecuting others for crimes he himself may have committed including drinking on duty, conduct unbecoming, sexual assault and harassment, and misuse of funds. Putting Hegseth at the helm of the Department of Defense would jeopardize any progress towards justice for survivors, and worsen an already pervasive culture of fear, sexism, and discrimination in the military.

In addition to his personal history, we can expect Hegseth to minimize efforts to address sexual violence and its particular impact on women given that he has consistently and repeatedly expressed deep hostility to the value of an inclusive, diverse military. For example, Hegseth has commented that "the dumbest phrase on planet Earth in the military is 'our diversity is our strength.'"<sup>4</sup> He has called the benefits of diversity "garbage,"<sup>5</sup> voiced his opposition to women in combat roles,<sup>6</sup> and has insulted transgender members of the military.<sup>7</sup> For women, people of color, and LGBTQI+ individuals who have historically faced discrimination and harassment in the military, his leadership not only threatens the progress that we have long fought for but also the functioning of our military itself - including readiness, retention, and recruitment efforts. Our military must be a place that enables all service members, of every gender, race, and faith, to serve with dignity and bring their full talents to bear. Hegseth has not demonstrated any ability or desire to provide the type of leadership that our service members deserve.

As the nominations process continues, the Senate must consider Hegseth's alarming record in addition to his character. Hegseth has also been the subject of widespread reports that he engaged

---

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Fiscal Year 2023. *Appendix B: Statistical Data on Sexual Assault*. Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, [https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/public/docs/reports/AR/FY23/FY23\\_Appendix\\_B.pdf](https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/public/docs/reports/AR/FY23/FY23_Appendix_B.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Bond, Shannon, et al. "What's behind Defense Secretary Pick Hegseth's War on 'Woke.'" NPR, 15 Nov. 2024, [www.npr.org/2024/11/14/nx-s1-5191941/pete-hegseth-defense-department-dei](http://www.npr.org/2024/11/14/nx-s1-5191941/pete-hegseth-defense-department-dei).

<sup>5</sup> Mayer, Jane. "Pete Hegseth's Secret History." *The New Yorker*, 1 Dec. 2024, [www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/pete-hegseths-secret-history](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/pete-hegseths-secret-history).

<sup>6</sup> Chan, Melissa. "Pete Hegseth's Remarks about Women in Combat Are Met with Disgust and Dissent." *NBCNews.Com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 15 Nov. 2024, [www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pete-hegseths-remarks-women-combat-are-met-disgust-dissent-rcna180136](http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pete-hegseths-remarks-women-combat-are-met-disgust-dissent-rcna180136).

<sup>7</sup> Charalambous, Peter. "Pete Hegseth's Plan to Overhaul America's Military: 'You Need to Fire a Ton of Generals.'" *ABC News*, ABC News Network, 14 Nov. 2024, [abcnews.go.com/US/pete-hegseths-plan-overhaul-americas-military-fire-ton/story?id=115842674](http://abcnews.go.com/US/pete-hegseths-plan-overhaul-americas-military-fire-ton/story?id=115842674).

in financial mismanagement of resources and malfeasance while leading two veterans organizations and contributed to a workplace culture of dereliction, including several incidents of public inebriation. For all service members, but especially for women who have continued to break barriers in the military, for LGBTQI+ people who have long faced discriminatory bans, and for people of color who have fought for equity throughout our nation's history – the leader of the Department of Defense must be a person who can lead with honor. Hegseth's nomination represents a direct threat to this progress.

Thank you,

Advocates for Trans Equality

American Humanist Association

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

ANew

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bend the Arc: Jewish Action

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center

Consent Awareness Network

Council for Global Equality

DemCast USA

Equal Rights Advocates

Equality California

Equality Labs

FFRF Action Fund

Girls for Gender Equity

Global Project Against Hate and Extremism

Government Information Watch

Guttmacher Institute

Human Rights Campaign

Interfaith Alliance

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Just Solutions  
League of Conservation Voters  
Legal Momentum, The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund  
Maine Women's Lobby  
Military Reform Coalition  
Minority Veterans of America  
Modern Military Association of America  
MomsRising  
Movement Advancement Project  
MPower Change Action Fund  
Mujeres Latinas En Accion  
Muslim Public Affairs Council  
NAACP  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Employment Law Project  
National Employment Lawyers Association  
National Institute for Workers' Rights  
National Organization for Women  
National Organization for Women, MI  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Women's Law Center  
National Women's Political Caucus  
National Workrights Institute  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Oregon Tradeswomen  
People For the American Way  
People's Action  
Physicians for Reproductive Health  
Pride At Work, AFL-CIO

Reproaction

Reproductive Freedom for All (formerly NARAL Pro-Choice America)

Respect Together

Restaurant Worker Committee

Silver State Equality

Stephen's College Women in Trades Pre Apprenticeship

SWOP Behind Bars Inc

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

The Project On Government Oversight

The Secular Coalition for America

UltraViolet Action

Women's Law Project

Workplace Justice Project

YWCA USA