

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304

August 31, 2020

The Honorable Kenneth Braithwaite
Secretary of the Navy
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Braithwaite:

As you know, COVID-19's impact on military readiness and force projection may have significant short-term and mid-term consequences. Nationally, we have been slow to respond to the requirement to administer testing procedures and testing availability, which would slow the spread of the virus. I am concerned that military readiness will suffer long-term impacts without adequate testing, until a more permanent vaccine solution is available.

Therefore, I want to alert you to a new University of Illinois initiative called SHIELD T3, which is a broad effort to expand the reach of widespread saliva-based testing with rapid results to limit the spread of COVID-19. The program was created to shield the campus community from the COVID-19 virus as students returned to their classes, and I believe this effort is worthy of further investigation by the Department of the Navy.

SHIELD T3 features a saliva-based test that is easy-to-administer, scalable, sensitive and specific to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The test produces rapid results, at costs significantly below current alternatives such as nasal swabs. Results are available within 2-6 hours rather than three days or more. This promising diagnostic obtained an emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration on August 19.

The quick turnaround time for test results is a key in curbing the virus, allowing isolation early enough to limit spread of the infection as well as narrowing down past exposure to allow more-effective contact tracing. It also identifies and isolates people with asymptomatic cases who would otherwise spread the virus unknowingly.

After having been personally briefed on this program, I believe this approach could be of great benefit to Naval Station Great Lakes, given the proximity to researchers at the University of Illinois and the major challenges in keeping a safe environment for recruits coming from all across the country.

I wish to raise it to your attention so that your subject matter experts can make an independent, objective, and science-based assessment on whether SHIELD T3 could be of use to the Department of the Navy. I look forward to hearing your views on the technology behind the program, and its applicability to Great Lakes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue color.

Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense