

Thomas A. Summers, Acting Chairman
Patricia L. Lee

**DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES
SAFETY BOARD**

Washington, DC 20004-2901



July 25, 2025

The Honorable Christopher Wright
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

Dear Secretary Wright:

The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) recognizes the critical importance of the Department of Energy's (DOE) missions to maintain our nation's nuclear deterrent and to clean up legacy radioactive waste. Per statute, DOE has been granted the authority to self-regulate nuclear and worker safety at its defense nuclear facilities. Congress established the Board more than three decades ago to provide independent nuclear safety oversight of the design, construction, operation, and decommissioning of DOE's defense nuclear facilities. Since its formation, the Board has remained steadfast in its commitment to ensuring adequate protection of the public and workers from hazards present at defense nuclear facilities, a commitment we know is shared by DOE.

As DOE contemplates changes to its organizational structure and regulatory approach—aligned with your recent testimony to Congress on improving efficiency and prioritizing core missions—the Board encourages DOE to implement changes that affect nuclear safety deliberately and with recognition of the many important lessons DOE has learned from past experiences with nuclear safety oversight. This is necessary to identify and avoid unintended consequences that could compromise the current high level of nuclear safety or leave DOE line managers in the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Office of Environmental Management with less awareness of safety issues across the defense nuclear complex.

Robust safety oversight is an essential factor in any successful nuclear operation. The Board has worked with DOE to increase the effectiveness of DOE's oversight by improving the technical capabilities of the personnel in charge of defense nuclear facilities, strengthening DOE's facility representative program, and ensuring rigorous safety oversight of complex, high-hazard nuclear operations.

The Board is confident that DOE can prevent negative safety impacts and seeks to understand (1) how DOE's potential changes to its workforce and regulatory approach will affect nuclear safety, and (2) the strategies DOE will implement to maintain effective federal safety oversight of the defense nuclear complex.

Pursuant to 42 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 2286b(d), the Board requests that DOE provide semiannual briefings outlining how it will ensure the adequacy and independence of DOE nuclear safety oversight at its defense nuclear facilities as it proceeds with organizational and regulatory changes. The first briefing should commence within 30 days of receipt of this letter. We believe such continuous engagement will promote mutual understanding and reinforce our shared commitment to safe mission accomplishment.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss how we can collectively uphold the highest standards of safety in our nation's defense nuclear facilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas A. Summers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Thomas A. Summers
Acting Chairman

- c: Ms. Teresa Robbins, Acting Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration
Mr. Roger A. Jarrell II, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management
Mr. Joe Olencz, Director, Office of the Departmental Representative to the Board