September 11, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John McCain
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

We write to express our strong support for Senate Amendment 656 to the National Defense Authorization Act as a vital matter of national security. The measure, offered by Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), would empower states to address rising election cybersecurity risks without long-term reliance on the federal government.

Election security is national security. Attacks on US voting systems threaten the most basic underpinnings of American self-government. And these attacks are growing in sophistication and scale. According to credible reports, hackers recently attempted to infiltrate election systems or voter registration systems in 39 states. North Korea has already demonstrated its willingness to use cyber-attacks to challenge its foes. Future risks could come from one of several hostile state or non-state actors.

We must act now. With the 2018 general election just over a year away, time is incredibly short. It will take months or longer to upgrade systems and adopt best practices. The Graham-Klobuchar amendment would help secure election systems ahead of the 2018 election by providing grant funding for states to implement security recommendations after receiving a Department of Homeland Security Risk and Vulnerability assessment.

Although election administration is the province of state and local governments, the federal government has a responsibility to support the states and "provide for the common defense." We do not expect the states to defend themselves against kinetic attacks by hostile foreign powers, nor should we leave them to defend against foreign cyberattacks on their own.

The Graham-Klobuchar Amendment strikes a prudent balance between state and federal action to secure elections. The measure would authorize appropriation of grants to the states to implement post-election audits and other cybersecurity defenses, following guidelines to be developed by the Election Assistance Commission in consultation with the states and leading security experts. States that choose to implement these recommended security guidelines could use remaining funds to upgrade their election equipment and replace paperless machines with systems that provide a verifiable paper trail.

On other matters of national security, the federal government provides states and municipalities with grants to fund security personnel and first-responders on the front lines of addressing threats. Given the longstanding role of the federal government in elections and the seriousness of emerging risks, the issue of voting security should be no different.

State and federal cost-sharing is essential. While recent estimates show that the United States could implement some of the most critical security measures for between $300 million and $500 million, the federal government would need only provide a portion of these funds as time-limited grants to catalyze state investments. This measure sets forth the process of securing elections, authorizing appropriation of "such sums as are necessary" and leaving the determination of federal funding levels to appropriators.

A major attack on a US election would have catastrophic consequences. Thankfully, state and federal authorities have effective and affordable means to defend elections—if they act promptly. We urge Congress seize this opportunity to defend a crucial aspect of US national security without delay.

Sincerely,

Michael Chertoff
Former Secretary of U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

Lt. Col. Tony Shaffer
London Center for Policy Research

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Former Chairman of the House Permanent
Select Committee on Intelligence

Ambassador R. James Woolsey
Former Director, Central Intelligence