Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 9, 2012

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As Congress and the White House move forward on reducing the federal deficit and putting the country back on a sustainable fiscal path, difficult choices lie ahead related to national defense spending. As we work together throughout this process, we write today to offer you critical information and seek your assistance to ensure we yield the greatest benefit to the taxpayers while fulfilling the goals of a strong and capable military.

As you are aware, the Pentagon is working to find $8.7 billion in savings out of the Air Force budget for the 2013 fiscal year. Having reviewed the FY13 Force Structure Announcement, we have learned that the Air Force proposal was developed using inaccurate information and are concerned this misinformation has resulted in a misguided recommendation to close the Pittsburgh International Airport (IAP) Air Reserve Station (911th Airlift Wing) and remove four KC-135 refueling aircraft from the 171st Air National Guard. We hope that you will intervene and review the data used in the Air Force decision-making process so that the force structure changes are based on objective and measurable criteria. We are confident if you review the cost, performance, and strategic need of 911th and 171st, you will agree that these two installations must be saved.

The 911th and 171st, both of which are located in Moon Township, Pennsylvania, are not only two of the most cost-effective installations in the nation's network of bases, they are model institutions for a lean and efficient fighting force, and offer unique attributes toward fulfillment of the military's strategic objectives. In particular, costs at the 911th Airlift Wing are significantly lower than any comparable installation. No other reserve or guard station can claim to have all-weather access — 24-7-365 — to four ten thousand foot runways at a fixed cost of only $20,000 per annum. Other reserve stations pay runway and emergency response expenses that are 200 times greater than that amount. Since pilots and crews at the 911th can train in open skies under diverse weather conditions without delay — unlike the congested conditions at other facilities — the cost per flying hour is significantly lower at the 911th.

Both the 911th and 171st offer joint training with other branches of the service, and regularly coordinate and work with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies and emergency responders. As part of the military's disaster preparedness responsibilities, few places have the assets of the Pittsburgh region, which is located within two hours of flying time of seventy percent of the country's population. And, the region's world-class medical system offers the military a unique combination of highly supportive operations and a readily accessible airport airlift hub.

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End-strength at both facilities is well above the national average because commanders can recruit from a unique talent pool. Many members of the 911th and 171st train and work in commercial aviation with airlines at the adjacent Pittsburgh International Airport. This large and stable labor pool has helped to ensure that the 911th and 171st regularly exceeded recruitment goals in each of the past seven years.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, the Pentagon has been making sizable physical plant and equipment investments in the 911th. Since 2004, more than $50 million has been spent on renovations and construction at the base. The Navy Reserve is set to construct a $13 million training support and operations center on the grounds of the 911th, and the Pentagon will soon break ground on a new $17 million commissary nearby. An expanded Post Exchange is also in the planning stages.

Beyond the strategic and financial value of the 911th, which we believe has been overlooked in the Air Force's structure changes, we have uncovered several factual flaws in the decision-making process. The Air Force maintains the Pittsburgh IAP ARS is the only reserve base with fewer than 300 authorized civilian personnel. However, the delegation is in receipt of information showing the 911th Airlift Wing is authorized to employ 318 civilians. If this is correct, the Air Force is in violation of 10 USC § 2687, which prohibits "the closure of any military installation at which at least 300 civilian personnel are authorized to be employed." Moreover, since the 911th has lower overhead costs and fewer authorized personnel than installations with similar missions, then the base is a victim of its own success. The Air Force may be unfairly targeting a successful base like the 911th in order to avoid congressional review as required under 10 USC § 2687.

The Air Force may have also relied upon the same faulty data regarding the 911th's physical size and capabilities even though this information has been discredited by the 1995 and 2005 BRAC commissions. For instance, a 2003 data call indicated the 911th could house no more than ten C-130 Hercules aircraft. The 2005 BRAC Commission Recommendation, however, found the Allegheny County Airport Authority had specifically set aside land adjacent to the military bases near the Pittsburgh International Airport for expansion. With the promise of additional land from the Airport Authority, the 911th could easily expand and house between 16 and 20 C-130s.

The delegation is deeply concerned that the proposal to close the 911th, as well as transfer four KC-135 refueling tankers from the 171st, was put forth without reliable and accurate data. In fact, during a meeting with Pennsylvania's congressional delegation on February 9, 2012, Air Force officials could not produce a written analysis indicating the reasons behind the 911th's proposed closure because no analysis existed. It appears the 911th may have been targeted for closure not because it is a costly base to maintain or has low performance marks, but because shuttering the 911th avoided approval from Congress or a BRAC-like commission.

The information presented in this letter leads us to ask for an additional study to be completed before the Pentagon moves forward with these Air Force structure changes or closure of the 911th Airlift Wing. To not do so could result in a devastating mistake for the military, the taxpayers, and the Pittsburgh region. Difficult decisions about operating costs and strategic priorities must be made. We only ask those decisions are based upon facts, driven by data, and fully transparent

to stakeholders. Given that time is of the essence, we respectfully and urgently seek your intervention. Please consider directing the Secretary of Defense to undertake a thorough review of the assumptions and data used by the Air Force in reaching its decision. Our constituents, the taxpayers, and the civilian personnel and reservists who are part of the 911th deserve to know the process was done in a fair and transparent manner. Since the base would be scheduled for closure in FY13, we look forward to your immediate attention to our request.

Sincerely,

Tim Murphy
Member of Congress

Mike Doyle
Member of Congress

Mark Critz
Member of Congress

Jason Altmire
Member of Congress

David McKinley
Member of Congress

Bill Shuster
Member of Congress

Mike Kelly
Member of Congress

Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress

CC: Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Senator Pat Toomey
Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta
Secretary of the Air Force, Michael B. Donley