January 16, 2018

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith:

As members of the House Committee on Armed Services (HASC) representing Hawaii’s First and Second Congressional Districts encompassing the entire State of Hawaii, we write this letter regarding the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) false emergency alert broadcast to the public on January 13, 2018. A detailed timeline of the incident is as follows:

January 13, 2018

8:07 a.m.: An employee of HI-EMA mistakenly broadcasts the following emergency alert through the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system across the state of Hawaii:

**Emergency Alert**
BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

8:10 a.m.: State Adjutant General, Major Gen. Joe Logan, contacts U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) to confirm there is no missile launch.

8:10 a.m.: The Honolulu Police Department (HPD) is notified of the false alert by HI-EMA.

8:13 a.m.: The state issues an internal cancellation of the warning to prevent the false alert message from being broadcast further.

8:20 a.m.: HI-EMA tweets: “NO missile threat to Hawaii.”

8:23 a.m.: HI-EMA posts: “NO missile threat to Hawaii. False alarm. We're currently investigating” on Facebook.

8:24 a.m.: Hawaii Gov. David Ige retweets HI-EMA’s 8:20 a.m. tweet, noting: “There is NO missile threat.”
8:30 a.m.: Hawaii Gov. David Ige posts: “NO Missile threat to Hawaii” on Facebook.

8:35 a.m.: Gov. Ige shared HI-EMA’s Facebook post: “NO missile threat to Hawaii. False alarm. We’re currently investigating.”

8:45 a.m.: HI-EMA broadcasts the following messages through EAS and WEA:

EAS messages over Local TV/Radio Audio Broadcast & Television Crawler Banner:
“False Alarm. There is no missile threat to Hawaii.”
“False Alarm. There is no missile threat or danger to the State of Hawaii. Repeat. There is no missile threat or danger to the State of Hawaii. False Alarm.”

WEA message:
“False Alarm. There is no missile threat or danger to the State of Hawaii.”

Based on the above timeline, it is undisputed that 38 minutes transpired (8:07 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.) before the HI-EMA retracted the false emergency alert of a ballistic missile inbound to Hawaii by the same communication channels as the original alert (EAS and WEA).

Shortly after the false emergency alert and retraction 38 minutes later on January 13, 2018, Chairman Ajit Pai of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced that the FCC was “launching a full investigation into the false emergency alert that was sent to residents of Hawaii,” questioning whether the state of Hawaii had the safeguards in place to prevent human error from causing a false alert to go out. Chairman Pai noted that the FCC was coordinating with both the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and HI-EMA. Chairman Pai subsequently issued a written statement on January 14, 2018, which can be found at: https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-348712A1.pdf. An FCC investigation team departs for Hawaii tomorrow (1/17/2018).

While Chairman Pai and the FCC are rightly concerned with the proper use of public/private communication channels for the transmission of alerts during public safety emergencies and are coordinating with FEMA in their investigation, we respectfully request HASC hold a hearing to investigate the relationship between the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) and HI-EMA as it relates to emergency alert messages involving national security. It is understandable that a state emergency management agency would have primary jurisdiction over state matters, including floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes (natural disasters) and other localized incidents. However, when it comes to matters of national security, including whether a ballistic missile has been launched against the United States, one must question whether any state emergency management agency is best suited for that role.

In the context of the January 13, 2018 HI-EMA false emergency alert, USPACOM, the competent authority from end-to-end in any military or national security scenario within USPACOM’s area of responsibility, appears to have been limited or restricted in its ability to override HI-EMA’s false emergency alert. Accordingly, this committee should question whether USPACOM should have the authority and capability to unilaterally broadcast emergency messages, including overrides of false alerts and unauthorized alerts, when it is aware that no
military threat exists and the issuing authority is remiss or unauthorized. Further, upon
information and belief, the HI-EMA broadcast on January 13, 2018 triggered the military’s mass
notification system, which had the inadvertent effect of validating HI-EMA’s false emergency
alert. This committee should explore how the military’s mass notification system is connected to
HI-EMA and whether the military should have the ability to de-link its mass notification system
from an emergency alert it knows to be false. Finally, with respect to military readiness,
operations and the national security of the United States, this committee should inquire to what
extent USPACOM had oversight over HI-EMA policies and procedures concerning the
broadcasting of military-related emergency alerts in the state of Hawaii. Is additional oversight
indicated in light of the January 13, 2018 HI-EMA event?

In closing, we thank the Chairman and Ranking Member in advance for their consideration of
our request. We look forward to working with the committee.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress

[Signature]

Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

cc:

House Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Adam Schiff