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OKLAHOMA

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United States Senate

July 27, 2021

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Director Patrick O'Brien
Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation
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Mr. O'Brien:

As the Director of the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC), who oversees the Public Schools on Military Installations (PSMI) program, I write to bring to your attention the deteriorating condition of the L. Mendel Rivers Elementary School at Altus Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

As you are aware, PSMI provides need-based grants to construct, renovate, repair, or expand public schools located on military installations based on their placement on the Deputy Secretary of Defense Public Schools on Military Installations (PSMI) Priority List. Depending on available funding appropriated from Congress, OLDCC invites local education authorities to apply for this opportunity.

Since FY 2011, when this program was first established, the average yearly funding amount for the grant program has been \$250 million. In FY 2021, \$284 million was allocated for the program and most recently, the FY 2022 House Defense Appropriations bill includes \$300 million for the grant program. I have included the Rivers Elementary School as a top priority in my requests to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.

Through previous appropriations funding, OLDCC has already provided construction funding for schools ranked 50 and below on the priority list and roughly supports up to ten projects per year. On the most recent iteration of the PSMI Priority List—approved by the Deputy Secretary of Defense on April 15, 2019—Rivers Elementary School was ranked number 55 for FY 2018 and given a condition index percentage of 59.50 and a quality rating of “4”—the worst rating.

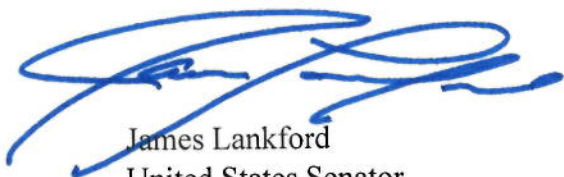
DOD itself has described the school's condition as “failing,” with the roof, HVAC, electrical, and plumbing systems all near failure. In addition, the school has received an “F” grade for space adequacy for its food services, gymnasium, special needs and information center. At the time of assessment, Rivers Elementary did not have an issue with its capacity limit of 437. Their current enrollment, however, is closer to 400 and in previous years has been over 600. These conditions have only declined since this priority list was released, placing Rivers Elementary School among the most deteriorated schools on military installations across the nation.

I have heard from OLDCC that Rivers Elementary School could see funding in FY22 with facilities renovations in FY23. It is my understanding that the school requires at least \$8.6 million in upgrades and is well-positioned to receive funding in the Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations package.

Given that the last major repair to the school was in 1986, a complete replacement is long overdue and is a necessary step to maintain the infrastructure of Altus Air Force Base. DOD has a responsibility to provide adequate and safe schools for military families, and the replacement of Rivers Elementary will greatly improve the quality of life for our military families in Altus.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to hear from you.

In God We Trust,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Lankford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James Lankford
United States Senator