DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, DC 20511

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairman
Select Committee on Intelligence
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chairman:

I am writing in response to your letter requesting my views on the effect that the detention provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 could have on the ability of the Intelligence Community to gather counterterrorism information. In my view, some of these provisions could limit the effectiveness of our intelligence and law enforcement professionals at a time when we need the utmost flexibility to defend the nation from terrorist threats. The Executive Branch should have maximum flexibility in these areas, consistent with our law and values, rather than face limitations on our options to acquire intelligence information. As stated in the November 17, 2011, Statement of Administration Policy for S. 1867, "[a]ny bill that challenges or constrains the President's critical authorities to collect intelligence, incapacitate dangerous terrorists, and protect the nation would prompt the President's senior advisers to recommend a veto."

Our principal objective upon the capture of a potential terrorist is to obtain intelligence information and to prevent future attacks, yet the provision that mandates military custody for a certain class of terrorism suspects could restrict the ability of our nation's intelligence professionals to acquire valuable intelligence and prevent future terrorist attacks. The best method for securing vital intelligence from suspected terrorists varies depending on the facts and circumstances of each case. In the years since September 11, 2001, the Intelligence Community has worked successfully with our military and law enforcement partners to gather vital intelligence in a wide variety of circumstances at home and abroad and I am concerned that some of these provisions will make it more difficult to continue to have these successes in the future.

Taken together, the various detention provisions, even with the proposed waivers, would introduce unnecessary rigidity at a time when our intelligence, military, and law enforcement professionals are working more closely than ever to defend our nation effectively and quickly from terrorist attacks. These limitations could deny our nation the ability to respond flexibly and appropriately to unfolding events – including the capture of terrorism suspects – and restrict a process that currently encourages intelligence collection through the preservation of all lawful avenues of detention and interrogation.

Our intelligence professionals are best served when they have the greatest flexibility to collect intelligence from suspected terrorists. I am concerned that the detention provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act could reduce this flexibility.

Sincerely,

James R. Clapper

cc: The Honorable Saxby Chambliss