

237 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3006
(202) 225-4671

504 BROADWAY
LONG BRANCH, NJ 07740
(732) 571-1140

67/69 CHURCH STREET
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901
(732) 249-8892

TOLL-FREE NUMBER:
(888) 423-1140

pallone.house.gov

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-3006

May 15, 2018

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Room HT-2, the Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today. I believe the Fiscal Year 2019 House budget should reflect an unwavering commitment to strengthening the independence of the Republic of Armenia, promoting peace in the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), and supporting Armenia as a regional safe haven for at-risk Middle East refugees. These investments will only help to advance and strengthen U.S. interests in the region and around the world.

Over 20 years ago, I worked with my colleagues in a bipartisan manner to create the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, ensuring U.S. legislators have a more focused approach with regards to American-Armenian relations. Since then, our caucus has grown to include 120 members of Congress, allowing all of us to gain more insight on Armenian culture and the issues the country faces.

Like many Americans, I am inspired by the perseverance the Armenian people have shown for thousands of years in spite of great challenges. This tenacious nature has helped the Armenian people to survive and move beyond terrible atrocities – including more recent examples like the Genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and crimes against humanity that were perpetrated by Azerbaijanis in 1988.

Historically, the United States has offered vocal and financial support to the Armenian people, starting with Ambassador Morgenthau and other concerned Americans who launched Near East Relief in the years after the Armenian Genocide. This Congressionally chartered humanitarian organization raised \$116 million (\$2.8 billion in 2018 dollars) to aid the victims of the Ottoman Empire's mass murder campaign. The generosity of the American people saved countless lives and ensured the continued survival of Armenian culture at the beginning of the 20th Century.

The generosity of the American people has carried through to this day, helping to usher in Democratic reforms for Armenia at the end of the Cold War and allowing it to create a market-based economy. These reforms are now on full display after peaceful protests in April led to the democratic and fair election of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian on May 8.

The State & Foreign Operations Subcommittee has followed in this tradition of generosity by supporting U.S. aid to Armenia and Artsakh. This aid has helped to provide maternal health care, support a multi-year HALO Trust land mine and unexploded ordnance clearance efforts, rehabilitation centers, and funds for badly needed water systems in Nagorno Karabakh. The FY19 appropriations bill should include \$6 million to strengthen these critical programs.

As Armenia is an important safe haven for refugees and a strategic American partner, U.S. aid has also provided critical support for U.S.-led peacekeeping deployments and NATO interoperability in the region. I ask that Armenia receive at least \$20 million to help the country provide transition support to refugees from Syria and throughout the Middle East who have found safe haven there.

Unfortunately, violence against the Armenian people continues today, in part because of continued U.S. military assistance to the Azerbaijani government. While much of the violence we saw in the spring of 2016 has subsided, Azerbaijan continues to launch cross-border attacks into Artsakh and Armenia. Rather than agreeing to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, President Aliyev of Azerbaijan has continued to offer threats of a renewed war between the two countries. The U.S. should suspend military aid to Azerbaijan until its government ceases its attacks against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh and agrees to the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.

For this reason, this year's bill should also continue to invest in peace by providing the OSCE Minsk Group with \$4 million, allowing for the placement of advanced gunfire locator systems and sound-ranging equipment to determine the source of attacks along the line of contact.

The FY19 appropriations bill should include \$30 million in economic aid and \$10 million in military aid for Armenia, including funds for the Foreign Military Financing program and the International Military Education and Training program. I also ask that the Committee encourage the Millennium Challenge Corporation, upon Armenia meeting its merit-based governance criteria, to give full and fair consideration to Armenia for a Science, Technology, Education, and Math education grant for its public school system.

Taking these steps will continue to build on the U.S.-Armenia strategic relationship and showcase its importance. I urge this committee to invest in peace, show our commitment as a nation to stable and pro-democracy nations, and help support Armenia's continued development.

Sincerely,



FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress