

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2422

To pause development of the new Sentinel program, extend the life of the Minuteman III, and redirect savings from Sentinel toward the Department of Education, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 23, 2025

Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. MERKLEY, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To pause development of the new Sentinel program, extend the life of the Minuteman III, and redirect savings from Sentinel toward the Department of Education, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Investing in Children
5 Before Missiles Act of 2025” or the “ICBM Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) According to the Congressional Budget Of-
2 fice, the projected cost to sustain and modernize the
3 United States nuclear arsenal, as of 2025, is “\$946
4 billion over the 2025–2034 period, or an average of
5 about \$95 billion a year”, and nuclear forces ac-
6 count for 8.4 percent of the total 10-year cost of the
7 plans for national defense outlined in the President’s
8 2025 budget submission.

9 (2) In September 2020, the Air Force awarded
10 a sole-source contract to Northrop Grumman for the
11 ground-based strategic deterrent program (now
12 called Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile pro-
13 gram), raising concerns that the absence of competi-
14 tion for the award would result in higher than pro-
15 jected costs to United States taxpayers. The pro-
16 gram is intended to replace 400 deployed Minute-
17 man III missiles with more than 600 new missiles,
18 to allow for test flights and spares.

19 (3) The Sentinel program has encountered sig-
20 nificant cost growth and schedule delays in recent
21 years, and the full extent of both remains uncertain
22 as the Department of Defense is currently restruc-
23 turing the program.

24 (4) In January 2024, increases in the total
25 costs of the Sentinel program triggered a review

1 under chapter 325 of title 10, United States Code
2 (commonly known as the “Nunn-McCurdy Act”),
3 which is intended to determine whether a program
4 that has experienced large cost overruns should con-
5 tinue, and what, if any, changes should be made to
6 control costs.

7 (5) In July 2024, the Department of Defense
8 completed that review and released a new estimate
9 of total costs for the program of \$141,000,000,000
10 in constant 2020 dollars, which is 81 percent (or
11 \$63,000,000,000) larger than the program’s baseline
12 2020 estimate of \$78,000,000,000. The total esti-
13 mated life cycle cost of the Sentinel program (not in-
14 cluding warheads) was estimated by the Department
15 of Defense to be \$260,000,000,000 in 2020 and is
16 undoubtedly higher today.

17 (6) In May 2025, the Air Force announced the
18 Sentinel program will likely “predominantly” require
19 digging fresh missile silos, a significant change from
20 previous plans to reuse existing silos and a move
21 that would likely cause further significant cost in-
22 creases and schedule delays.

23 (7) According to public reports, officials of the
24 Department of Defense expect the restructuring ef-
25 fort to delay the Sentinel program by several years.

1 The Department of Defense’s 2025 budget plans
2 called for initial operating capability to be achieved
3 in May 2029, a date that, as of the date of the en-
4 actment of this Act, looks unachievable. The Air
5 Force is considering contingency plans that would
6 extend the life of Minuteman III intercontinental
7 ballistic missiles by 11 more years to 2050 if delays
8 continue to plague the Sentinel missiles intended to
9 replace them.

10 (8) The National Nuclear Security Administra-
11 tion is developing a replacement intercontinental bal-
12 listic missile warhead, the W87–1, for the Sentinel
13 and expanding plutonium pit production to build
14 new warhead cores, costing at least \$14,000,000,000
15 and \$18,000,000,000, respectively.

16 (9) Even in the absence of an intercontinental
17 ballistic missile leg of the triad, the United States
18 would have an assured retaliatory capability in the
19 form of multiple ballistic missile submarines, which
20 are virtually undetectable, and there are no known,
21 near-term credible threats to the survivability of the
22 ballistic missile submarine force. The survivability of
23 the submarine force will be enhanced as the Depart-
24 ment of Defense moves to replace the Ohio class bal-

1 listic submarine fleet with the new Columbia class
2 ballistic missile fleet.

3 (10) While intercontinental ballistic missiles
4 have historically been the most responsive leg of the
5 United States nuclear triad, advances in ballistic
6 missile submarine communications to allow for the
7 dissemination of emergency action messages in war-
8 time have negated that advantage.

9 (11) Intercontinental ballistic missiles based in
10 silos are vulnerable and, once launched, cannot be
11 recalled, leaving decisionmakers with mere minutes
12 to decide whether to launch the missiles before they
13 are destroyed, known as a posture of “launch on
14 warning” or “launch under attack” in the face of a
15 perceived nuclear attack, greatly increasing the risk
16 of a national leader initiating a nuclear war by mis-
17 take.

18 (12) Under current policy, the President has
19 the authority—

20 (A) to launch United States nuclear weap-
21 ons first and is not limited to retaliation;

22 (B) to launch nuclear weapons under
23 warning of attack, rather than waiting for evi-
24 dence of attack; and

1 (C) to launch nuclear weapons on the
2 President's sole order.

3 (13) False alarms have happened multiple times
4 and can happen again. For example, in 1980, a false
5 alarm was reported to the Assistant to the President
6 for National Security Affairs and was almost re-
7 ported up to President Jimmy Carter as a real at-
8 tack but was luckily identified in time. Recent Pen-
9 tagon reports have found that, as a result of
10 cyberattacks, the President could be faced with false
11 warnings of attack or lose the ability to control nu-
12 clear weapons.

13 (14) In 1983, Stanislav Petrov, a former lieu-
14 tenant colonel of the Soviet Air Defense Forces cor-
15 rectly identified a false warning in an early warning
16 system that showed several United States incoming
17 nuclear missiles, preventing Soviet leaders from
18 launching a retaliatory response, earning Colonel
19 Petrov the nickname "the man who saved the
20 world".

21 (15) Former Secretary of Defense William J.
22 Perry wrote that the ground-based leg of the nuclear
23 triad is "destabilizing because it invites an attack"
24 and intercontinental ballistic missiles are "some of

1 the most dangerous weapons in the world” and
 2 “could even trigger an accidental nuclear war”.

3 (16) General James Cartwright, former vice
 4 chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former Com-
 5 mander of the United States Strategic Command,
 6 wrote, with Secretary Perry, “[T]he greatest danger
 7 is not a Russian bolt but a US blunder—that we
 8 might accidentally stumble into nuclear war. As we
 9 make decisions about which weapons to buy, we
 10 should use this simple rule: If a nuclear weapon in-
 11 creases the risk of accidental war and is not needed
 12 to deter an intentional attack, we should not build
 13 it. . . . Certain nuclear weapons, such as . . . the
 14 [intercontinental ballistic missile], carry higher risks
 15 of accidental war that, fortunately, we no longer
 16 need to bear. We are safer without these expensive
 17 weapons, and it would be foolish to replace them.”.

18 (17) General George Lee Butler, the former
 19 Commander-in-Chief of the Strategic Air Command
 20 and subsequently Commander-in-Chief of the United
 21 States Strategic Command, said, “I would have re-
 22 moved land-based missiles from our arsenal a long
 23 time ago. I’d be happy to put that mission on the
 24 submarines. So, with a significant fraction of bomb-
 25 ers having a nuclear weapons capability that can be

1 restored to alert very quickly, and with even a small
 2 component of Trident submarines—with all those
 3 missiles and all those warheads on patrol—it’s hard
 4 to imagine we couldn’t get by.”.

5 (18) While a sudden “bolt from the blue” first
 6 strike from a near-peer nuclear adversary is a highly
 7 unlikely scenario, extending the Minuteman III
 8 would maintain the purported role of the interconti-
 9 nental ballistic missile leg of the triad to absorb such
 10 an attack.

11 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY ON MINUTEMAN III, SEN-**
 12 **TINEL, AND EDUCATION FUNDING.**

13 It is the policy of the United States that—

14 (1) as of the date of the enactment of this Act,
 15 the Sentinel program is significantly over budget
 16 and behind schedule and should be paused and re-
 17 evaluated for need and technical merit;

18 (2) the operational life of the Minuteman III
 19 missile should be safely extended until at least 2050;
 20 and

21 (3) investments in the Department of Edu-
 22 cation are a better use of United States taxpayer re-
 23 sources than continuing with the current Sentinel
 24 program.

1 **SEC. 4. AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS FOR EDUCATION INSTEAD**
2 **OF SENTINEL.**

3 (a) TRANSFER FROM DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.—
4 The Secretary of Defense shall transfer all amounts ap-
5 propriated to the Department of Defense for the research,
6 development, test, and evaluation of the Sentinel program,
7 and available for obligation as of the date of the enactment
8 of this Act, to the Department of Education to carry out
9 part A of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Edu-
10 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6311 et seq.).

11 (b) TRANSFER FROM NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY
12 ADMINISTRATION.—The Secretary of Energy shall trans-
13 fer all amounts appropriated to the National Nuclear Se-
14 curity Administration for the W87–1 warhead modifica-
15 tion program, and available for obligation as of the date
16 of the enactment of this Act, to the Department of Edu-
17 cation to carry out part A of title I of the Elementary
18 and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6311
19 et seq.).

20 **SEC. 5. PROHIBITION ON USE OF FUNDS FOR GROUND-**
21 **BASED STRATEGIC DETERRENT PROGRAM**
22 **AND W87–1 WARHEAD MODIFICATION PRO-**
23 **GRAM.**

24 None of the funds authorized to be appropriated or
25 otherwise made available for fiscal year 2026 may be obli-

1 gated or expended for the Sentinel program or the W87–
 2 1 warhead modification program.

3 **SEC. 6. INDEPENDENT STUDY ON EXTENSION OF MINUTE-**
 4 **MAN III INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MIS-**
 5 **SILES.**

6 (a) INDEPENDENT STUDY.—Not later than 30 days
 7 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
 8 of Defense shall seek to enter into a contract with the Na-
 9 tional Academy of Sciences to conduct a study on extend-
 10 ing the life of Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic
 11 missiles to 2050 or beyond.

12 (b) STAFFING.—

13 (1) EXPERTS.—The conduct of the study re-
 14 quired by subsection (a) shall include input from a
 15 wide variety of technical and subject matter experts.

16 (2) PROHIBITION ON CERTAIN AIR FORCE EM-
 17 PLOYEES.—No member or former member of the Air
 18 Force or employee or former employee of the De-
 19 partment of the Air Force who is or was paid for
 20 work relating to the Sentinel program may partici-
 21 pate in the conduct of the study required by sub-
 22 section (a).

23 (c) ELEMENTS.—The study required by subsection
 24 (a) shall address the following:

1 (1) A comparison of the costs through 2050
2 of—

3 (A) extending the life of Minuteman III
4 intercontinental ballistic missiles; and

5 (B) deploying the Sentinel program.

6 (2) An analysis of opportunities to incorporate
7 technologies into the Minuteman III intercontinental
8 ballistic missile program as part of a service life ex-
9 tension program that could also be incorporated in
10 a possible future Sentinel program, including, at a
11 minimum, opportunities to increase resilience
12 against adversary missile defenses.

13 (3) An analysis of the benefits and risks of in-
14 corporating sensors and nondestructive testing meth-
15 ods and technologies to reduce destructive testing re-
16 quirements and increase the service life and number
17 of Minuteman III missiles through 2050.

18 (4) An analysis and validation of the methods
19 used to estimate the operational service life of Min-
20 uteman II and Minuteman III motors, taking into
21 account the test and launch experience of motors re-
22 tired after the operational service life of such motors
23 in the rocket systems launch program.

24 (5) An analysis of the risks and benefits of al-
25 ternative methods of estimating the operational serv-

1 ice life of Minuteman III motors, such as those
2 methods based on fundamental physical and chem-
3 ical processes and nondestructive measurements of
4 individual motor properties.

5 (6) An analysis of risks, benefits, and costs of
6 configuring a Trident II D5 submarine-launched bal-
7 listic missile for deployment in a Minuteman III silo.

8 (7) An analysis of the impacts of the estimated
9 service life of the Minuteman III force associated
10 with decreasing the deployed intercontinental bal-
11 listic missiles delivery vehicle force from 400 to 300
12 or less.

13 (8) An assessment of the extent to which the
14 Columbia class ballistic missile submarines will pos-
15 sess features that will enhance the current invulner-
16 ability of ballistic missile submarines of the United
17 States to future antisubmarine warfare threats.

18 (9) An analysis of the extent to which an exten-
19 sion of the life of the Minuteman III missiles would
20 impact the decision of the Russian Federation to
21 target intercontinental ballistic missiles of the
22 United States in a crisis, compared to proceeding
23 with the Sentinel.

24 (10) A best case estimate of what percentage of
25 the strategic forces of the United States would sur-

1 vive a counterforce strike from the Russian Federa-
2 tion, broken down by intercontinental ballistic mis-
3 siles, ballistic missile submarines, and heavy bomber
4 aircraft.

5 (11) The benefits, risks, and costs of relying on
6 the W-78 warhead for either the Minuteman III or
7 a new Sentinel missile as compared to proceeding
8 with the W-87 life extension.

9 (12) The benefits, risks, and costs of adding
10 additional launchers on submarines or uploading
11 submarine-launched ballistic missiles with additional
12 warheads to compensate for a reduced deployment of
13 intercontinental ballistic missiles of the United
14 States.

15 (d) REPORT REQUIRED.—

16 (1) SUBMISSION TO DEPARTMENT OF DE-
17 FENSE.—Not later than 180 days after the date of
18 the enactment of this Act, the National Academy of
19 Sciences shall submit to the Secretary of Defense a
20 report containing the results of the study conducted
21 under subsection (a).

22 (2) SUBMISSION TO CONGRESS.—Not later than
23 210 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
24 the Secretary shall transmit to the appropriate con-

1 gressional committees the report required by para-
2 graph (1), without change.

3 (3) FORM.—The report required by paragraph
4 (1) shall be submitted in unclassified form, but may
5 include a classified annex.

6 (4) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-
7 TEES DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term “ap-
8 propriate congressional committees” means—

9 (A) the Committee on Armed Services, the
10 Committee on Foreign Relations, and the Com-
11 mittee on Appropriations of the Senate; and

12 (B) the Committee on Armed Services, the
13 Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Com-
14 mittee on Appropriations of the House of Rep-
15 resentatives.

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