

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4707

To amend title 10, United States Code, to establish policy for the Department of Defense on maximizing autonomy and artificial intelligence systems, to establish requirements relating to Department review and verification of autonomous weapon systems and artificial intelligence capabilities, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 8, 2026

Mr. COONS (for himself and Mr. REED) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To amend title 10, United States Code, to establish policy for the Department of Defense on maximizing autonomy and artificial intelligence systems, to establish requirements relating to Department review and verification of autonomous weapon systems and artificial intelligence capabilities, 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 “Responsible Artificial
5 Intelligence Defense Act of 2026”.

1 **SEC. 2. POLICY AND GUIDANCE RELATED TO AUTONOMOUS**
2 **WEAPON SYSTEMS AND ARTIFICIAL INTEL-**
3 **LIGENCE CAPABILITIES ACQUISITION.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 345 of title 10, United
5 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
6 lowing new section:

7 **“§ 4577. Autonomous weapon systems and artificial**
8 **intelligence capabilities acquisition; plan-**
9 **ning and oversight processes**

10 “(a) POLICY.—It is the policy of the Department of
11 Defense to maximize uses of autonomy and artificial intel-
12 ligence capabilities to the extent practicable, while ensur-
13 ing and maintaining that implementation of such auton-
14 omy and artificial intelligence capabilities provides contin-
15 uous and rigorous human oversight to ensure that oper-
16 ations are conducted in accordance with the law of war,
17 applicable treaties, weapon system safety rules, applicable
18 rules of engagement, and long-standing frameworks pro-
19 tecting the privacy and civil liberties of United States per-
20 sons.

21 “(b) REQUIREMENT.—In accordance with the policy
22 set forth in subsection (a), the Secretary of Defense
23 shall—

24 “(1) ensure personnel exercise appropriate lev-
25 els of human judgment and consistently monitor any
26 deployed artificial intelligence-enabled autonomous

1 weapons systems, while remaining responsible for
2 the development, deployment, and use of autono-
3 mous weapon systems and artificial intelligence ca-
4 pabilities;

5 “(2) take deliberate steps to ensure accuracy in
6 autonomous weapon systems and artificial intel-
7 ligence capabilities;

8 “(3) develop and deploy autonomous weapon
9 systems and artificial intelligence capabilities in a
10 manner that promotes an appropriate understanding
11 of the technology, their development processes, and
12 operational methods applicable to autonomous weap-
13 on systems and artificial intelligence capabilities;

14 “(4) subject prototype and deployed autonomy
15 and artificial intelligence capabilities to routine test-
16 ing and information assurance across their entire
17 life cycles to ensure that capabilities meet defined
18 safety, security, and effectiveness parameters; and

19 “(5) design and engineer autonomy and artifi-
20 cial intelligence capabilities to fulfill their intended
21 functions, and deploy these capabilities such that
22 human operators—

23 “(A) retain the ability to detect and avoid
24 unintended consequences or behaviors; and

1 “(B) retain a means for human interven-
2 tion to disengage or deactivate deployed sys-
3 tems that demonstrate unintended or illegal be-
4 havior.

5 “(c) REVIEW FOR AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS
6 AND SUPPORTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CAPABILI-
7 TIES.—

8 “(1) LEVELS OF HUMAN JUDGMENT.—(A) The
9 Secretary shall ensure that any autonomous weapon
10 system or artificial intelligence capability to be uti-
11 lized by the Department, except as exempted by sub-
12 section (c), is categorized by the appropriate level of
13 human judgment required to mitigate risks to life,
14 safety and health of Department personnel or non-
15 combatant civilian harm.

16 “(B) For purposes of subparagraph (A), appro-
17 priate levels of human judgment for an autonomous
18 weapon system shall consist of two levels as follows:

19 “(i) Level 1, which means that the weapon
20 system poses little to no risk to human life or
21 safety should the system fail to act as designed.

22 “(ii) Level 2, which means that the weapon
23 system poses moderate to high risk to human
24 life or safety should the system fail to act as
25 designed.

1 “(C) Appropriate levels of human judgment for
2 an artificial intelligence capability shall consist of
3 two levels as follows:

4 “(i) Level 1, which means that the artifi-
5 cial intelligence capability poses little to no risk
6 as a result of compromise of data integrity or
7 operational support should the system fail to
8 act as designed.

9 “(ii) Level 2, which means that the artifi-
10 cial intelligence capability—

11 “(I) uses data protected by section
12 552a of title 5 (commonly known as the
13 ‘Privacy Act of 1974’) or regulations pro-
14 mulgated under the Health Insurance
15 Portability and Accountability Act of 1996
16 (Public Law 104–191); or

17 “(II) poses a risk such that the failure
18 of the artificial intelligence system to act
19 as designed would severely affect the abil-
20 ity of the Department to perform the des-
21 ignated mission of the artificial intelligence
22 capability.

23 “(2) REVIEW AND VERIFICATION.—Subject to
24 subsection (d), for any autonomous weapon system
25 or artificial intelligence capability under development

1 or being fielded by the Department, the Secretary
2 shall ensure that such autonomous weapon system
3 or artificial intelligence capability requires—

4 “(A) before a decision to enter prototyping
5 or formal development, review and verification
6 by the Under Secretary of Defense for Research
7 and Engineering that—

8 “(i) the system design incorporates
9 the necessary capabilities to allow com-
10 manders, operators, and analysts to exer-
11 cise appropriate levels of human judgment
12 over the use of force in the envisioned
13 planning and employment processes for the
14 autonomous weapon system or artificial in-
15 telligence capability;

16 “(ii)(I) the autonomous weapon sys-
17 tem or artificial intelligence capability is
18 designed to complete engagements within a
19 timeframe and geographic area, as well as
20 other applicable environmental and oper-
21 ational parameters, consistent with com-
22 mander and operator intentions; or

23 “(II) if not designed as described in
24 subclause (I), the autonomous weapon sys-
25 tem or artificial intelligence capability will

1 terminate engagements or obtain addi-
2 tional operator input before continuing the
3 engagement;

4 “(iii) the combination of the design
5 and concept of employment of the autono-
6 mous weapon system or artificial intel-
7 ligence capability, such as its target selec-
8 tion and engagement logic and other rel-
9 evant processes or measures, accounts for
10 risks to nontargets, consistent with com-
11 mander and operator intent and the laws
12 of war;

13 “(iv) the design of the autonomous
14 weapon system or artificial intelligence ca-
15 pability, including system safety, anti-tam-
16 per mechanisms, and the cybersecurity of
17 the autonomous weapon system or artificial
18 intelligence capability, in accordance with
19 Department of Defense Instruction
20 8500.01 (relating to cybersecurity), or suc-
21 cessor instruction, addresses and mini-
22 mizes the probability and consequences of
23 failures;

24 “(v) plans are in place for verification
25 and validation and test and evaluation to

1 establish the reliability, effectiveness, and
2 suitability of the autonomous weapon sys-
3 tem or artificial intelligence capability
4 under realistic conditions, including pos-
5 sible adversary actions, to a sufficient
6 standard consistent with the potential con-
7 sequences of an unintended engagement or
8 unauthorized parties interfering with the
9 operation of the autonomous weapon sys-
10 tem or artificial intelligence capability
11 prior to fielding; and

12 “(vi) a preliminary legal review of the
13 autonomous weapon system or artificial in-
14 telligence capability has been completed—

15 “(I) in coordination with the
16 General Counsel of the Department of
17 Defense; and

18 “(II) in accordance with Depart-
19 ment of Defense Directive 5000.01
20 (relating to Defense Acquisition Sys-
21 tem), or successor directive, Depart-
22 ment of Defense Directive 2311.01
23 (relating to Department of Defense
24 Law of War Program), or successor
25 directive, and, where applicable, De-

1 partment of Defense Directive
2 3000.03E (relating to Department of
3 Defense Agent for Non-Lethal Weap-
4 ons and Non-Lethal Weapon Policy),
5 or successor directive; and

6 “(B) before fielding, review and
7 verification by the Under Secretary for Re-
8 search and Engineering, in consultation with
9 the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,
10 that, with respect to the autonomous weapon
11 system or artificial intelligence capability—

12 “(i) system capabilities, human-ma-
13 chine interfaces, doctrine, tactics, tech-
14 niques and procedures, and training have
15 been demonstrated to allow commanders
16 and operators to exercise appropriate levels
17 of human judgment over the use of force
18 and to employ systems with appropriate
19 care and in accordance with the law of
20 war, applicable treaties, weapon system
21 safety rules, and definable rules of engage-
22 ment that are applicable or reasonably ex-
23 pected to be applicable;

24 “(ii) system safety, anti-tamper mech-
25 anisms, cyber survivability, operational re-

1 silience, and cybersecurity capabilities have
2 been implemented to minimize the prob-
3 ability and consequences of failures;

4 “(iii) for autonomous weapon systems
5 or artificial intelligence capabilities that
6 are being fielded that may have gone
7 through the development pipeline and
8 verified under subparagraph (A), an up-
9 dated legal review of the weapon system or
10 artificial intelligence capability has been
11 completed—

12 “(I) in coordination with the
13 General Counsel of the Department of
14 Defense; and

15 “(II) in accordance with Depart-
16 ment of Defense Directive 5000.01
17 (relating to Defense Acquisition Sys-
18 tem), or successor directive, Depart-
19 ment of Defense Directive 2311.01
20 (relating to Department of Defense
21 Law of War Program), or successor
22 directive, and, where applicable, De-
23 partment of Defense Directive
24 3000.03E (relating to Department of
25 Defense Agent for Non-Lethal Weap-

1 ons and Non-Lethal Weapon Policy),
2 or successor directive; and

3 “(iv) a monitoring regime is in place
4 to identify and address changes in oper-
5 ational environment, data inputs, and use
6 that could contribute to failure of the sys-
7 tem or capability to act in a manner con-
8 sistent with the intent for the system or
9 capability.

10 “(3) VALIDITY OF VERIFICATION.—(A) The
11 Secretary shall treat each verification under para-
12 graph (2) or paragraph (4) as valid for a period of
13 three years.

14 “(B) An autonomous weapon system or artifi-
15 cial intelligence capability that is a substantially
16 similar variant of another autonomous weapon sys-
17 tem or artificial intelligence capability that is
18 verified under paragraph (2) or paragraph (4) shall
19 also be treated as verified.

20 “(4) SUBSEQUENT REVIEW AND
21 VERIFICATION.—(A) For any autonomous weapon
22 system or artificial intelligence capability that was
23 previously verified under paragraph (2)(A) or ex-
24 empted under any predecessor review process under
25 Department of Defense Directive 3000.09 (relating

1 to Autonomy in Weapon Systems), that does not
2 currently have a valid verification pursuant to para-
3 graph (3), the Secretary shall ensure that it under-
4 goes subsequent review and verification under such
5 paragraph.

6 “(B) For any autonomous weapon system or
7 artificial intelligence capability that was previously
8 verified under paragraph (2)(B) or exempted under
9 any predecessor review process under Department of
10 Defense Directive 3000.09 (relating to Autonomy in
11 Weapon Systems) that does not currently have a
12 valid verification pursuant to paragraph (3), the
13 Secretary shall ensure that it undergoes subsequent
14 review and verification under such paragraph as if
15 it had not been deployed.

16 “(5) PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS.—(A) For
17 each artificial intelligence capability classified under
18 subsection (c)(1)(C)(ii), the Secretary ensure that a
19 privacy impact assessment is conducted by the Di-
20 rector for Privacy, Civil Liberties and Transparency.

21 “(B) In carrying out a privacy impact assess-
22 ment under subparagraph (A), the Director may
23 consult with such technical and policy experts in the
24 Department of Defense or elsewhere in the Federal
25 Government as the Director considers appropriate.

1 “(6) WAIVER OF UPDATED LEGAL REVIEW.—
2 The Under Secretary of Defense for Research and
3 Engineering may temporarily waive the requirement
4 for an updated legal review under paragraph
5 (2)(B)(iii) for longer than one year if the capability
6 is being deployed in response to real-world conflict
7 or for compelling national interest.

8 “(d) EXCEPTIONS.—The following categories of au-
9 tonomous weapon systems are not subject to the policy
10 set forth in subsection (a) or the requirements of sub-
11 section (b) and (c):

12 “(1) Operator-supervised autonomous weapon
13 systems used to select and engage materiel targets
14 to intercept attempted time-critical or saturation at-
15 tacks.

16 “(2) Operator-supervised autonomous weapon
17 systems used to select and engage materiel targets
18 for defending operationally deployed remotely piloted
19 or autonomous vehicles or vessels.

20 “(3) Autonomous or semi-autonomous cyber-
21 space capabilities, reasonably judged to be non-lethal
22 in nature.

23 “(4) Unarmed platforms, whether remotely op-
24 erated or operated by onboard personnel, and wheth-
25 er autonomous or semi-autonomous.

1 “(5) Unguided munitions.

2 “(6) Munitions manually guided by the oper-
3 ator.

4 “(7) Mines.

5 “(8) Unexploded explosive ordnance.

6 “(9) Autonomous or semi-autonomous systems
7 that are not weapon systems.

8 “(10) Any weapon system—

9 “(A) that is not continuously monitored by
10 a human operator;

11 “(B) that the Secretary, after completing
12 review of the system per subsection (c), has de-
13 termined to be safer and more reliable for the
14 intended use than alternative systems that are
15 verified for such use per subsection (c) and in-
16 volve continuous human supervision; and

17 “(C) for which—

18 “(i) the Secretary has notified the
19 congressional defense committees of the in-
20 tended use of the system; and

21 “(ii) no congressional defense com-
22 mittee has objected to during the 30-day
23 period beginning on the date on which the
24 notice was submitted under clause (i).

1 “(e) PROHIBITIONS ON CERTAIN USES OF AUTON-
2 OMY OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES.—Ex-
3 cept as may be provided in another statute, the Secretary
4 may not use autonomy or an artificial intelligence capa-
5 bility for any of the following use cases:

6 “(1) For the decision to initiate the launch of
7 a nuclear weapon.

8 “(2) For the monitoring, tracking, profiling, or
9 targeting of an individual or group of individuals
10 reasonably believed to be in the United States, with-
11 out a warrant obtained based on probable cause of
12 a crime with an individualized, articulable legal
13 basis, or the collection, querying, or analysis of in-
14 formation about the same not otherwise permissible
15 under the Constitution of the United States, regard-
16 less of the origin of the data used, except for activi-
17 ties conducted in accordance with applicable provi-
18 sions of law.

19 “(3) In the employment of lethal force by au-
20 tonomous weapon systems without incorporation of
21 appropriate levels of human judgment.

22 “(f) VERIFICATION, VALIDATION, TESTING AND
23 EVALUATION OF AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS
24 LEVERAGING AUTONOMY OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
25 SYSTEMS.—For each autonomy and artificial intelligence

1 system that is covered by the policy set forth in subsection
2 (a), regardless of the acquisition pathway or test and eval-
3 uation oversight status for an autonomous weapon system
4 or artificial intelligence capability, the Director for Oper-
5 ational Test and Evaluation shall ensure the autonomous
6 weapon system or artificial intelligence capability func-
7 tions as anticipated in realistic operational environments
8 against adaptive adversaries and are sufficiently robust to
9 minimize failures, including by ensuring—

10 “(1) such autonomous weapon system or artifi-
11 cial intelligence capability goes through rigorous
12 hardware and software verification and validation
13 and realistic system developmental and operational
14 test and evaluation, including analysis of unantici-
15 pated emergent behavior to assess system perform-
16 ance, capability, reliability, effectiveness, and suit-
17 ability under realistic conditions, including possible
18 adversary actions, consistent with the potential con-
19 sequences of unintended engagement or unauthor-
20 ized parties interfering with the operation of the sys-
21 tem or capability;

22 “(2) hardware and software verification and
23 validation include iterative cyber test and evaluation
24 in accordance with Department of Defense Instruc-
25 tion 5000.89 (relating to Test and Evaluation), or

1 successor instruction, to verify that autonomous
2 weapon system or artificial intelligence capability is
3 resilient and survivable in contested cyberspace, if
4 relevant to the purpose and mission of the system or
5 capability;

6 “(3) systems incorporating autonomy or artifi-
7 cial intelligence capabilities go through rigorous de-
8 velopmental and operational test and evaluation to
9 verify and validate that autonomous weapon system
10 or artificial intelligence capability is robust accord-
11 ing to design requirements;

12 “(4) test and evaluation of systems incor-
13 porating autonomy or artificial intelligence capabili-
14 ties include testing to confirm that their autonomy
15 or artificial intelligence algorithms can be rapidly re-
16 programmed on new input data to enable timely cor-
17 rection of any unintended system behaviors that may
18 be observed or discovered during future system oper-
19 ations;

20 “(5) adequate training, tactics, techniques, pro-
21 cedures, and doctrine are available, periodically re-
22 viewed, and used by system operators and com-
23 manders to understand the functioning, capabilities,
24 and limitations of the system’s autonomy or artifi-
25 cial intelligence in realistic operational conditions;

1 “(6) system design and human-machine inter-
2 faces are readily understandable to trained opera-
3 tors, with clear ability for trained operators to acti-
4 vate and deactivate system functions;

5 “(7) after initial operational testing and evalua-
6 tion, as directed by the Director, system data is col-
7 lected and any further changes to the system under-
8 go appropriate verification, validation, test, and eval-
9 uation to ensure that critical safety features have
10 not been degraded;

11 “(8) system software is tested using the best
12 means and methods available to the Department to
13 validate that critical safety features have not been
14 degraded;

15 “(9) automated testing tools, such as modeling
16 and simulation, are used whenever feasible;

17 “(10) testing identifies any new operating
18 states and other relevant changes in the autonomous
19 weapon system or artificial intelligence capability;

20 “(11) as directed by the Director—

21 “(A) each new or revised operating state
22 undergoes appropriate and tailored additional
23 test and evaluation to characterize the system
24 behavior in that new operating state; and

1 “(B) whole system follow-on operational
 2 test and evaluation when required due to
 3 changes to the state transition matrix; and

4 “(12) in coordination with the Under Secretary
 5 for Research and Engineering and Director, the
 6 owning component of the Department provides for
 7 monitoring to identify and address when changes to
 8 the system design or operational environment re-
 9 quire additional testing and evaluation to provide
 10 sufficient confidence that the system will continue to
 11 avoid unintended engagements and resist inter-
 12 ference by unauthorized parties.

13 “(g) AUTONOMY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
 14 SYSTEMS WORKING GROUP.—

15 “(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—(A) The Secretary
 16 shall establish and charter a working group for the
 17 purposes set forth in paragraph (2).

18 “(B) The working group established under sub-
 19 paragraph (A) shall be known as the ‘Autonomy and
 20 Artificial Intelligence Working Group’.

21 “(2) PURPOSES.—The purposes set forth in
 22 this paragraph are as follows:

23 “(A) To support the Under Secretary of
 24 Defense for Research and Engineering, and the
 25 Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in

1 considering the full range of relevant Depart-
2 ment interests during the review of autonomous
3 weapon systems and artificial intelligence capa-
4 bilities before formal development.

5 “(B) To support the Under Secretary of
6 Defense for Research and Engineering and the
7 Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in
8 considering the full range of relevant Depart-
9 ment interests during the review of autonomous
10 weapon systems before deployment.

11 “(C) When requested by appropriate rep-
12 resentatives of the secretaries of the military
13 departments, the Commander of United States
14 Special Operations Command, or, when applica-
15 ble, a director of a defense agency or a Depart-
16 ment of Defense Field Activity—

17 “(i) to advise whether a given weapon
18 system requires senior-level approval in ac-
19 cordance with this section; and

20 “(ii) to help identify and advise on ad-
21 dressing potential issues presented by a
22 given weapon system during a potential
23 senior-level review in accordance with this
24 section.

1 “(D) To develop and issue safety stand-
2 ards for use of autonomy and artificial intel-
3 ligence capabilities in evaluation of such capa-
4 bilities.

5 “(h) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than January 31
6 of each year until January 31, 2037, the Secretary shall
7 submit to the congressional defense committees an annual
8 report on the administration of this section.

9 “(i) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

10 “(1) The term ‘artificial intelligence’ has the
11 meaning given the term section 5002 of the National
12 Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act of 2020 (15
13 U.S.C. 9401).

14 “(2) The term ‘autonomous weapon systems’
15 means a weapon system that, once activated, can se-
16 lect and engage targets without further intervention
17 by an operator. Such term includes operator-super-
18 vised autonomous weapon systems that are designed
19 to allow operators to override operation of the weap-
20 on system but can select and engage targets without
21 further operator input after activation.

22 “(3) The term ‘autonomy’ means a capability
23 (or set of capabilities) that enables a particular ac-
24 tion of a system to be automatic or, within specified

1 boundaries self-governing with minimal human over-
2 sight.”.

3 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
4 for chapter 345 of title 10, United States Code is amended
5 by inserting after the item related to section 4576 the fol-
6 lowing new item:

“4577. Autonomous weapon systems and artificial intelligence capabilities acqui-
sition; planning and oversight processes.”.

