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March 22, 2017

Lieutenant General Alan R. Lynn
Director, Defense Information Systems Agency
6910 Cooper Ave.
Fort Meade, MD 20755

Dear Lieutenant General Lynn:

I write concerning the security of unclassified military email and to urge the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) to enable STARTTLS, an encryption technology widely used across the federal government and the private sector, to better protect email communications.

As you may know, the technology industry created STARTTLS fifteen years ago to allow email servers to communicate securely and protect email messages from surveillance as they are transmitted over the internet. STARTTLS is widely supported by email server software but, critically, it is often not enabled by default, meaning email server administrators must turn it on.

Major technology companies like Google, Yahoo, Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Apple use STARTTLS, as do the White House, Senate, and House of Representatives. Many agencies within the U.S. government also use STARTTLS, like the National Security Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

News reports indicate that DISA's mail.mil servers did not appear to use STARTTLS as late as 2015, something my staff believes is still the case. My office also has reason to believe the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard all rely on the mail.mil service provided by DISA. The Air Force's email server, us.af.mil, appears to have enabled STARTTLS.

While I understand the Department of Defense employs a number of other security technologies to protect classified and unclassified email messages, I am concerned that DISA is not taking advantage of a basic, widely used, easily-enabled cybersecurity technology. Indeed, until DISA enables STARTTLS, unclassified email messages sent between the military and other organizations will be needlessly exposed to surveillance and potentially compromise by third parties. I urge you to enable STARTTLS for mail.mil and appreciate your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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