



DEFENSE INFORMATION SYSTEMS AGENCY

P O BOX 549
FORT MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-0549

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-3703

27 APR 2017

Dear Senator Wyden:

Thank you for your letter dated March 22, 2017 regarding enabling STARTTLS for mail.mil in order to secure unclassified email between the military and other organizations. DISA recognizes and appreciates the value that STARTTLS can provide when communicating with external entities, and we do use STARTTLS on a case-by-case basis where specific mission and business requirements establish the need for encrypted communications.

Currently, Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) based encryption technology is used within the Department of Defense (DoD) to encrypt email between DoD users and many of its partners. PKI is used as a means to securely exchange email with others as long as the sender has the recipient's public key. PKI is also widely used by federal agencies and DoD industry partners for email encryption and strong user identification/authentication.

We have made a deliberate risk-based decision not to use other encryption protocols such as STARTTLS by default when communicating outside the DoD via email. This allows us to inspect each email for malicious software, phishing attempts, and other exploits. DISA currently rejects over 85% of all DoD email traffic coming from the Internet on a daily basis due to malicious behavior. The remaining 15% of email traffic is also inspected for Zero Day threats that exploit an undisclosed cybersecurity vulnerability. We also inspect for advanced, persistent threats using detection methods developed using national level intelligence. Many of these detection methods would be rendered ineffective if STARTTLS were enabled. DISA has been actively looking at architectural changes that allow the potential use of STARTTLS on a default basis while still enabling us to apply safeguards against the email threat vector.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah E. Zabel", is positioned above the typed name.

SARAH E. ZABEL
Major General, USAF
Vice Director