



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Office of the Vice President for Research

118 College Drive #5116
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5116
Fax: 601.266.5755
www.usm.edu

August 1, 2019

National Institute of Standards and Technology
Computer Security Division
100 Bureau Drive
Gaithersburg, MD 20899

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft of NIST Special Publication 800-171B.

The University of Southern Mississippi is among the nation's leading research institutions, designated a Research 1 Doctoral University with very high research activity by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Our research portfolio is broad and our federal sponsors many—Department of Defense, NOAA, NASA, Education, NSF, Homeland Security, and more.

While we share the desire to safeguard sensitive information, we are concerned with several elements of the proposed controls in 800-171B.

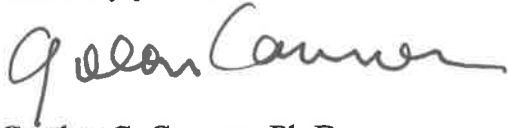
- Terminology such as “high value asset” and “critical program” should be defined so that there is consistency across agencies and cannot be applied arbitrarily. We already see inclusion of contracting terms when they do not apply to the work being done, and we spend time negotiating those out. Federal contract officers sometimes tell us that if a clause does not apply that it is “self-deleting” and it is up to us to know whether it applies to our contract or not. We cannot afford that kind of ambiguity or overzealous application of these requirements given the resources and costs involved.
- We would like to know in advance if a funding program will require compliance with 800-171B. This will ensure that the government receives proposals only from organizations who do or can comply. If we don't know that these controls apply until we receive a contract, we are left in a position of either declining the contract or delaying the project until we do comply, if we even can comply. This is a financial and time burden on both the federal government and potential contractors.
- Costs for some of these controls is prohibitive for most university research programs, including ours. According to the estimate provided by the DOD, we can expect to spend up to \$66M to achieve full compliance. That is out of our reach, unless we could plan to phase in these controls over a number of years. Having clear criteria for

the conditions under which these controls will apply will help us make a determination as to whether or not our research programs are likely to require compliance with 800-171B, and therefore enable us to plan accordingly.

- We would like to see an affirmative statement that 800-171B does not apply to fundamental research, in accordance with National Security Decision Directive 189. Controls on fundamental research are not appropriate.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gordon Cannon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Gordon C. Cannon, Ph.D.
Vice President for Research