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California lawmakers are calling on the Air Force to provide new fighter aircraft to Fresno's 144th Fighter Wing of the California Air National Guard.

A hefty list of Golden State lawmakers sent a letter to Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall requesting that the Air Force provide F-35 or F-15EX fighters to replace the older F-15C aircraft currently being used.

Along with Senators Dianne Feinstein and Alex Padilla, the Congressional representatives from the Central Valley that signed the letter were House GOP Leader Kevin McCarthy (R–Bakersfield), David Valadao (R–Hanford), Connie Conway (R–Tulare) and Tom McClintock (R–Elk Grove), and Jim Costa (D–Fresno). “The F-15C aircraft of the 144th Fighter Wing are nearing the end of their service, and we understand that the Department of the Air Force is working now to identify replacement aircraft,” the letter reads.

“We believe the F-35 or F-15EX would enable the 144th Fighter Wing to continue to expand its vital and longstanding mission to provide air superiority and homeland defense from its strategic location near the Pacific.”

Initially started in 1948, the 144th Fighter Wing operates out of the Fresno Air National Guard Base at Fresno Yosemite International Airport.

“The 144th Fighter Wing has strong support from the local community, directly supports the Air Sovereignty Alert mission, and remains ready for operational deployments. Given the essential mission of the 144th Fighter Wing – which aligns with the top priorities in the National Defense Strategy of defending the homeland and deterring China – we believe it is imperative to provide it with the most advanced aircraft available,” the letter reads.

“Further, the 144th Fighter Wing only transitioned to the F-15C in 2013, and recapitalizing with an older aircraft would set up another transition as those aircraft reach either the end of their service lives or obsolescence. Providing the F-35 or F-15EX aircraft would help ensure the 144th Fighter Wing is able to continue executing its mission without interruption.”