

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 30, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Mattis and Secretary Wilkie:

We write to bring your attention to a series of health concerns raised by Granite Staters regarding the incidences of cancer among members of the military who served at the former Pease Air Force Base and the 157<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing at Pease Air National Guard Base. We have heard from a number of military retirees and their families who believe that exposure to approximately a dozen known carcinogens as well as ground and drinking water contaminated by per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have caused serious negative health impacts, including the development of a number of cancers ranging from prostate to bladder cancer. These members of the community have called for the New Hampshire National Guard (NHNG) to conduct a study to determine the causes and contributing factors for these cancers.

In response to these health related concerns, the 157<sup>th</sup> will host a “community listening session” for all current and former members of the NHNG and their families and have also announced that they will establish a contact database to distribute updates through the New Hampshire State Office of Veterans Services. We commend the NHNG for proactively working with the community to hear their concerns and take demonstrable steps to address this situation. However, we believe that the onus to determine the causes of these cancers should not be placed solely on the NHNG and request that representatives from the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) meet with the NHNG and participate in the community listening session.

As you know, members of the military may be exposed to numerous chemicals and substances throughout their service and there is precedent within both the DOD and the VA for studying service connected-exposure to hazardous chemicals, substances and conditions. Furthermore, military job functions associated with the aerial refueling mission are not unique to Pease. There are 18 aerial refueling wings within the National Guard and similar job functions are performed by service members in other types of units both on active duty and in the reserve component around the world, making the DOD and VA more equipped to develop and conduct studies related to hazardous exposures and health outcomes.

We appreciate the DOD’s support to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and its investigations of the human health implications due to PFAS contamination as required by section 316 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2018. We believe this study will lead to information that will provide answers to many New Hampshire families that have been exposed to drinking water contaminated by PFAS, including those that may have been exposed at Pease.

However, given that the negative health effects experienced by former service members at Pease may stem from other chemical or harmful substance exposures, we request answers to the following inquiries:

- What studies have the DOD and the VA conducted with respect to cancers caused as a result of military service? Are there plans for additional studies?
- How does the DOD and VA plan to assess cancer rates among current and former Pease Air Force Base and Pease Air National Guard Base personnel as well as other similar units and the entire military population?
- What information, if any, does DOD record regarding chemical exposures, including time, quantity, and type? Which organizations, if any, does DOD share this information with?
- What is the VA currently doing to update its list of hazardous chemicals and materials that qualify for service-connected benefits?
- How are DOD and VA education service members and veterans who may have been exposed to hazardous chemicals, including on availability of medical and service records, evidentiary standards for disability claims and chemical exposure information for DOD, VA and private medical providers?
- If the DOD and VA are not currently able to conduct cancer studies or update the list of chemical exposures that warrant VA benefits, please explain what obstacles prevent you from doing so.
- What additional authorities or resources are needed to examine these concerns so that we may consider them in the Fiscal Year 2020 budget cycle?

We appreciate your commitment to our men and women in uniform, veterans and their families. We thank you for your attention to this important matter and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Carol Shea-Porter  
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

CC: General Joseph L. Lengyel, Chief, National Guard Bureau  
The Honorable Heather Wilson, Secretary of the Air Force  
The Honorable Mark T. Esper, Secretary of the Army  
The Honorable Richard V. Spencer, Secretary of the Navy