

## Testimony of

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Cancer Survivors Against Radon (CanSAR)

## Regarding

FY16 Appropriations for the Radon “SIRG” Program in EPA

March 18, 2015

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, thank you for this opportunity to testify today in support of \$8 million in funding for EPA’s State Indoor Radon Grant (SIRG) program.

My name is Kyle Hoylman. I grew up in a small town in Southern Ohio. My father was a forester – he loved being outdoors. We spent countless hours together roaming the woods that were passed down through generations of my family. Our home of more than 30 years was located on a hillside that backed up to these woods. Each evening, our family shared dinner together at the big table overlooking the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains – more importantly, we shared what was happening in each of our daily lives with one another. These memories are those I choose to hold close of the home I grew up loving – a home that later proved to be deadly to my father.

In December of 2008, I received a call from my father that changed my life. He had been diagnosed with lung cancer. He didn’t understand. Lung cancer was something that attacked people who smoked. He was a non-smoker. How could this be happening to him? For the first time in my life, I heard fear in the voice of my father – something that was unimaginable to this adult who still looked upon his father as his Superman. Six months later, Dad was no longer with us. I was fortunate to have spent the last month of his life with him. He wasn’t ready to go. He still had things he wanted to accomplish, like seeing the Grand Canyon and walking amongst the majestic redwoods in California. He fought for his life, but cancer ultimately won the battle and Dad left this world much too soon. His bucket list lives on with our family, though, and he will see the Grand Canyon and walk amongst the redwoods with us someday.

Our home tested at 30 pico Curies per liter of air, more than 7 times the EPA action level for radon exposure. To put this into perspective, **I grew up living in a home that was exposing me and my family to the radiation dose that would be equivalent to receiving 1,500 chest x-rays – per year.** If we had known, my dad might still be with us today. You see, radon-induced lung cancer is preventable through testing and mitigation. We didn’t know.

Unlike my father, I am a cancer survivor. I won my battle. Understanding that each day, a person in our county loses their own battle with radon-induced lung cancer every 26 minutes is sobering. I know what my family has gone through. Knowing that these lives could have been saved is why I am here today.

Let me offer some facts about radon:

- Radon is a naturally-occurring radioactive gas that comes from uranium. When the gas becomes trapped in our homes and buildings, occupant health and safety is of concern. Radon is easily inhaled, where it can become trapped in our lungs.
- According to the CDC, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers, second only to smoking, and the seventh leading cause of all cancer deaths.
- Radon is colorless, odorless and tasteless. **The only way to know if a problem exists is to test our homes and buildings.** If a problem does exist, fixing it is easy and economical.
- Elevated concentrations of radon have been found in every state. No area of our country is risk-free.

Ten years ago, the US Surgeon General warned us about radon, advising that every home should be tested. Our state radon programs are the most important resource in making our citizens aware of this warning. The SIRG program is the only federal program that exists to help our state programs in this important mission – and the FY16 budget proposes to eliminate it.

From my perspective, cutting our nation's radon program is the exact opposite of what is needed. In fact, a strong case can be made that we should actually be spending more to prevent radon-induced lung cancer. In addition to the lives saved, the return on investment in preventing the costly direct and indirect healthcare burden is compelling.

According to the EPA's own Inspector General's 2008 report, "Nearly two decades after passage of the 1988 Indoor Radon Abatement Act (IRAA), exposure to indoor radon continues to grow. Efforts to reduce exposure through mitigation or building with radon-resistant new construction have not kept pace." The radon problem in our country is getting worse, not better. We have more buildings with elevated radon levels today than in 1988, which is when your colleagues passed the Indoor Radon Abatement Act – a law designed to address the radon problem in our country. Twenty five years later, an American dies every 26 minutes from radon-induced lung cancer. According to a TODAY SHOW report, an estimated 70,000 classrooms contain toxic radon levels. One of every 15 homes in our country contains toxic levels of radioactive radon gas. Does this sound like a program that should be cut or eliminated? I sincerely hope not. The hard reality is that this is a program that's voluntary nature has proven to be ineffective. With the evident ineffectiveness of the program, why hasn't EPA taken steps to regulate? After all, the Administrator was given the authority to regulate some 25 years ago. How many more lives need to be taken by this preventable disease before EPA wakes up? A simple, inexpensive test is all that is required during the real estate transaction to know if a problem exists.

The overall impact of eliminating the SIRG program will be the systematic elimination of our country's outreach and education efforts as they pertain to radon. A majority of our 45 state and tribal radon programs will be forced to close or eliminate their public outreach programs. Basic data collection on radon risk reduction will no longer occur. Fewer of our buildings will be tested, and when a problem is found, it will not be fixed. Consumers will no longer have a state

or tribal program to protect their interests in dealing with unregulated contractors. Low income citizens will no longer receive free radon test kits or objective advice on radon risk reduction. More than 70,000 classrooms in our country with toxic levels of radon will never be identified and fixed so our children can learn in a safe environment. Our soldiers, and their families, living in military housing containing toxic levels of radon will continue to be put at risk. But the greatest impact of all is the more than 21,000 lives that will continue to be lost each year. For those of us who are reminded each day of the importance of preventing radon-induced lung cancer, this is not acceptable.

On behalf of the members of CanSAR, I respectfully ask for this Committee to do the following:

**1. First, and by far the top priority, is our request for the Subcommittee to restore the \$8 million for the SIRG program,** the \$8 million that is proposed to be eliminated by the President's FY16 Budget proposal. SIRG is the only federal program that provides essential matched funding to the states to conduct and continue programs designed to bring radon education and mitigation to your constituents. If SIRG funding were indeed cut, we should expect that nearly all the state programs would be rendered ineffective, or collapse altogether.

This request is not a request for an increase in funding or for new funding, but rather a continuation of funding. It is not new money.

While EPA's comments in the Budget submittal might indicate that SIRG has achieved its purposes and is no longer necessary, the facts indicate otherwise. The American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists (AARST) can produce for the record recent annual reports from nearly one-third of the states that document how SIRG funds are being used to good effect and the necessity of SIRG funds to continue that work.

Further, EPA is in the process of rolling out its proposed National Radon Action Plan (NRAP). While EPA has denied that its shift from the existing Federal Radon Action Plan (FRAP) to NRAP does not signal a divestment by EPA on radon action, the proposal to eliminate SIRG raises doubts about that assertion. In fact, if NRAP were rolled out today as the first EPA action on radon, we would argue that SIRG would need to be invented for NRAP to be successful.

The bottom line is that the \$8 million to support SIRG is essential to move forward in radon education and mitigation. Without it, state action to attack this problem will stagnate or halt.

**2. Secondary recommendation.** While the \$8 million restoration in SIRG funding is the clear top priority, let me suggest other actions the Subcommittee can take with regard to funding, and language to ensure that funding is used to its best utility.

CanSAR supports the \$1 million increase for Environmental Program Management – but with a condition added to the increase. The FY16 Budget proposes \$3.36 million, an increase of \$1 million. In 2014, we learned that, even with restored funding for SIRG, the administration of grants under the program was inhibited due to a shortage of FTEs. We believe that this funding increase would be helpful in enhancing the success of the SIRG program. **Mr. Chairman, we would recommend that if the Subcommittee does grant the \$1 million increase for**

**Environmental Program Management, that the Subcommittee include language to require the Administrator to use such funds in this account as necessary to secure the FTEs necessary for full and timely implementation of the SIRG program.**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCollum, all Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your kind attention. The Subcommittee has a strong, consistent history in supporting this appropriation and the SIRG program in the past. I would like to thank all of the Members of the Committee for this support, and I ask that the Subcommittee do so again for FY16. I thank you for your foresight and leadership on this issue. Your action will help save lives. I would be pleased to take your questions.

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