

The Honorable Dan Kildee
Michigan's 5th Congressional District
Testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
Member Day Hearing on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2020

Thank you, Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz and Ranking Member Carter, for allowing me to testify about PFAS chemicals, a public health crisis impacting hundreds of communities across America.

PFAS are a class of man-made chemicals that have been used for decades on military bases and in consumer products. The chemicals are very effective at being fire-, grease- and water-resistant and have been used in a wide range of products, including firefighting foam, Teflon, food packaging and clothing.

Although effective, studies have shown PFAS chemicals pose significant health issues in people, including cancer, thyroid disease and pregnancy complications. In addition, these chemicals build up in people's bodies and are toxic even at small levels.

In fact, the EPA's safe level of exposure for two types of PFAS, PFOA and PFOS, is 70 parts per trillion. To put that into perspective, that is just a few drops in 20 Olympic size swimming pools. These chemicals are toxic and a serious threat to human health.

There are two primary sources of PFAS chemicals: the first includes industrial sites where consumer products are made. The second, which I will focus on in my testimony today, is firefighting foam at military installations across the country.

I represent Oscoda, Michigan, a small, rural community that is home to the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base. At one time, Wurtsmith was home to part of the Strategic Air Command B-52 fleet. Veterans who worked at Wurtsmith were exposed to PFAS in firefighting foam. But nearby Oscoda residents were also affected, since PFAS chemicals used on the base have leached into the nearby groundwater and private drinking water wells.

Despite the Defense Department knowing about this at Wurtsmith since 2009, the military has failed to act quickly enough to stop contamination coming from the former Air Force base. As a result, PFAS continues to leech into the ground and surface water in Oscoda that people use for drinking.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Wurtsmith is just one of 401 military sites identified as having known or potential releases of PFAS after decades of use of firefighting foam by the military. Across the nation, community residents, service members and their families are increasingly fearful of exposure to PFAS chemicals. Each week, Members of Congress from across the country tell me about their constituents who want greater action to protect public health from these chemicals.

Last Congress, working with Chairwoman Wasserman Shultz—and I am very thankful for the Chairwoman’s work on this—the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill allocated \$14 million to clean up PFAS at BRAC bases. This is

the first time there was a specific allocation to fund PFAS chemical clean up at BRAC bases like former Wurtsmith Air Force Base. In addition, although outside this subcommittee, there was \$134 million allocated for active military bases. Unfortunately, even when combined, this represents only a small fraction of the resources that will be needed to clean up hundreds of PFAS-contaminated sites, and yet the Defense Department has not requested additional funds.

According to the GAO, of the 401 sites the military identified as having PFAS contamination, the Defense Department has only acted at 32 of those to clean-up contamination—less than 10 percent of all identified sites.

Clearly, the GAO study shows that this is not only impacting my district, but also many districts across the country and more needs to be done.

I believe that the Defense Department in particular so far failed to act with the required urgency to address this growing public health and environmental crisis. During a recent House Oversight and Reform hearing on PFAS, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health Maureen Sullivan testified that it will cost more than \$2 billion to clean up PFAS contamination around military bases.

Yet, the President's budget this year does not reflect anywhere near that amount. In fact, for BRAC bases, the President did not request a single dollar to address PFAS contamination. Since the

Administration failed to ask for the money to address this serious health issue, Congress needs to act.

Thus, I ask that this subcommittee prioritize funding to clean up PFAS at BRAC bases like Wurtsmith during FY 20. I greatly appreciate the Chairwoman and her staff's efforts last Congress to help secure \$14 million for PFAS remediation at BRAC bases, but much more needs to be done.

I hope we can build on last year's work and secure additional funding this fiscal year to address the \$2 billion need. If we do not appropriate the money, the problem will only grow and more Americans will be exposed to harmful chemicals in their drinking water. The military communities and those living in them deserve better from their government.

This year, I worked with Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania to create the bipartisan Congressional PFAS Task Force. This Task Force has grown to 34 members since its inception in January and we are continuing to add members frequently.

This week, more than twenty members of the Task Force sent a letter to this subcommittee asking for more robust funding to address PFAS contamination.

In closing, I ask for your support given this request and I thank you for your continued leadership on this issue.