

May 14, 2019

The Honorable Paul Tonko
Chairman, Subcommittee of Environment and Climate Change
2369 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Shimkus
Ranking Member, Subcommittee of Environment and Climate Change
2217 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tonko, Ranking Member Shimkus, and Honorable Committee Members,

Thank you for holding this very important legislative hearing entitled, “Protecting Americans at Risk of PFAS Contamination & Exposure.” Thank you also for this opportunity to provide comment on behalf of myself, my family, and Westfield Residents Advocating For Themselves.

Westfield, Massachusetts is a community positioned in the western portion of the state, at the southeastern foothills of the Berkshires. Our city is bisected roughly in half, North/South, by the Westfield River. Barnes Air National Guard Base is located in the North side of our City, atop the Barnes Aquifer, into which all four of our North side municipal wells tap. Presumably because of fire training exercises spanning decades, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have been detected in all four of these wells, and several private wells in the contamination plume area that spans roughly three miles from the air base to the river. In a 2018 letter to the Westfield City Council, researchers from Silent Spring Institute noted that, “PFOS levels in Well 7 were in the top 0.5% of all samples in public water supplies tested across the U.S.” Those tests were performed *before* the EPA modified method 537 to account for branched chain isomers, so those PFOS levels, while in the top 0.5%, were dramatically less than they would have been if the same water sample were analyzed today.

As you can well imagine, legislation aimed at “Protecting Americans at Risk of PFAS Contamination & Exposure” is extremely important to us, as it is to every other person whose lives have been affected by these toxic, persistent, and pervasive chemicals. Essentially, we all need to: stop our exposure - from air, water, soils, biosolid use, and foods; clean up the contamination; stop PFAS use and discharges; create the legal framework required to hold accountable those responsible for PFAS contamination; and create the laboratory capacity and public health supports to assess the extent of PFAS contamination in our environment and bodies.

Affected Americans, at this point, still do not have access to accurate information about sources of PFAS in their communities, as it is not required to be reported. Without designating PFAS as hazardous substances or hazardous waste, we are left without a means to stop PFAS discharges to our environment and our bodies, and we are left with the victims of PFAS contamination and exposure bearing the cost for clean up as well as medical care, loss in property values, and lost time at work.

Eliminating PFAS exposure in air, from industrial emissions, product degradation, and inadequate PFAS incineration must be addressed. Due to the toxicity, mobility, and fate of these “forever chemicals”, and the intimate and dynamic relationship between surface water, groundwater, and soil, along with eliminating discharges, we need PFAS contamination characterization in the surface waters, groundwaters, and soils of affected communities. Protection from PFAS exposure and contamination also requires informed consent and carefully managed use of PFAS containing products for consumers and particularly for fire fighters whose personal protective gear and equipment are loaded with PFAS.

It also bears mentioning that since many of the PFAS contamination sites are surrounding military bases, affected communities here and abroad need the help of the U.S. government to require the Department of Defense provide clean drinking water immediately and make every timely effort to restore the natural resources they have polluted.

While elimination and clean up are necessary at this very moment, neither can be completely and safely accomplished. Therefore, we all need research into safe, complete PFAS destruction, and into the toxicity and health effects that have resulted from decades of mismanagement and coverup.

Thank you for holding this legislative hearing and for accepting these comments into the record. Americans across the globe, contaminated without consent, are depending on our government to step up and do the right things to address our toxic PFAS problems.

Very sincerely,

Kristen L. Mello

Co-founder, WRAFT
Westfield Residents Advocating For Themselves
<https://www.facebook.com/WRAFT01085>
klm.wraft@gmail.com