

Written Testimony of Congressman Paul D. Tonko (NY-20)
Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee
10:00 am, Wednesday, May 16, 2018
334 Cannon House Office Building

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the invitation to testify before your committee today. I come before you first to advocate for the thousands of Veterans who served at Fort McClellan, Alabama and are seeking to know whether their service time there made them ill.

Shortly after I was first elected to Congress in 2008, I met with a constituent named Sue Frasier who had served at Fort McClellan in the 1970's as part of the Women's Army Corps. Sue described for me the numerous health problems she had experienced since her time at Fort McClellan, including fibromyalgia, autoimmune disorders, and asthma. Most significantly, Sue had to undergo a hysterectomy at age 37.

Sue's story is not an isolated one. As my office began to investigate this issue further, we've heard from hundreds of vets from all over the country who served at Fort McClellan that are experiencing similar health issues, consistent with PCB exposure.

I have introduced legislation, H.R. 3666, the Fort McClellan Health Registry Act, that would notify those who served at Fort McClellan of potential contamination and create a voluntary health study to assess the validity of their claims. Over the years, this issue has gained the support of more than 100 Members of Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and grassroots organizations, and yet we have made little progress. I want to personally thank those of you on this Committee on both sides of the aisle that have lent your support to this pro veteran legislation in the past. Our mission here is simple: obtaining basic information that can help these veterans receive the care they deserve. Unfortunately, after ten long years and support from many members on this Committee, we are still stalled. We have yet to have a hearing or a vote on this important issue. And this inaction has a price - while we wait, these veterans become sicker.

This is an issue that deserves debate in an open forum. I do not pretend to have all the answers, and I'm happy to work with anyone from either party to find a solution to this issue. However, what we cannot do is continue to turn a blind eye to these Veterans who are simply seeking to understand why they are so sick. Caring for our veterans is a top priority and this is a debate worth having.

I urge this committee to take action on the Fort McClellan Health Registry Act or related legislation to address the needs of the Fort McClellan Veterans.