



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Haley Stevens (D-MI)
of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology

Joint Hearing of
Environment and Research & Technology Subcommittees:
Forever Chemicals: Research and Development for Addressing the PFAS Problem

December 7, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Sherrill, it is great to be chairing this hearing with you this morning. And welcome to all of our witnesses. Thank you for joining us to share your expertise on a very important issue, I'm looking forward to your testimony. I'm particularly excited to welcome our witness, Abigail Hendershott, a fellow Michigander, and the Executive Director of the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team, MPART.

PFAS are a group of human-made chemicals that have been manufactured since the 1940's and can be found in a wide range of both consumer and industrial products. There is growing evidence that these chemicals are linked to adverse health outcomes including liver damage, thyroid disease, an increased risk of cancer, and reduced antibody response, especially in children. Research has also shown that there are numerous pathways through which humans can be exposed to these chemicals. Unfortunately, PFAS is extremely resistant to degradation in the environment – that is why they are known as “forever chemicals.”

Exposure to PFAS chemicals continues to harm the health and wellbeing of families across America. My home state of Michigan has the most PFAS-contaminated sites in the country thus making it the state's biggest environmental crisis in half a century.

Although scientific knowledge regarding PFAS is still developing, PFAS are linked to serious adverse health effects in humans and animals. And the more we find out, the worse the picture appears. Last month, the EPA sounded the alarm bell and asked its Science Advisory Board (SAB) to review new analyses and data that suggest the two chemicals — which have been found in many drinking water and surface waters in Michigan and around the country — are far more toxic than previously thought. While officials in Michigan have taken steps to address this crisis, there is so much more to be done at every level of government.

Our efforts in Michigan need to be strengthened by congressional action. In order to adequately address this threat, we need the federal government to step it up. That is why I was proud to cosponsor Representative Dingell's *PFAS Action Act*, an expansive bill to regulate, cleanup PFAS contamination. This bill included my own PROTECT Act, which directs the EPA to add PFAS chemicals to the list of hazardous air pollutants under the Clean Air Act. This bipartisan bill passed the House, but is still awaiting action in the Senate.

While we still have a lot to learn about the extent of PFAS contamination and the health risks associated with prolonged exposure. We need to acknowledge PFAS as an environmental hazard and conduct much-needed research so that we fully understand the danger that contamination poses for Americans across the country. Given the widespread applications of PFAS, a whole-of-government approach is required to research and address these chemicals. Agencies in the Science Committee's jurisdiction have a critical role to play in this effort.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) supports fundamental research through multiple directorates to better understand PFAS, including the fate and transport of PFAS in environmental systems, and the effects of PFAS contamination on communities. NSF-supported research also focuses on developing technologies to effectively degrade, destroy, or permanently sequester PFAS in the environment. Additionally, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) works to create reference materials and data resources that can be used by government, academic, and industrial labs to increase confidence in PFAS measurements, critical work given the wide range of chemical structures of PFAS and the limited availability of chemical standards for these measurements.

These are just two of the many federal agencies who are conducting excellent research to address the PFAS problem. I'm encouraged by the work and coordination that is taking place but there is still much we do not know and much more we must do to address this crisis in our communities. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the gaps in the federal approach and how we can best leverage the work done by Federal agencies and their partners.

Thank you, and I yield back.