

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2023

Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin,

We strongly urge you to identify the resources necessary to accelerate environmental cleanups and reduce the Department of Defense's (DOD) growing backlog of contaminated sites in the President's Budget for FY 2025.

Two years ago, a DOD witness testified before the House Committee on Appropriations that DOD's cleanup liability exceeded \$29 billion, but that costs would likely increase as more sites were investigated for contamination from "forever chemicals," known as per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (or "PFAS"). The Defense Environmental Restoration Program is failing to keep pace with its rapidly increasing cleanup obligations, including an expanding PFAS contamination crisis across numerous DOD installations and former military sites.

The escalation in cleanup costs is well underway. In just over two years, PFAS contamination of groundwater or drinking water has been confirmed at an additional 128 locations, bringing the total number of sites with confirmed PFAS contamination to over 450 sites. DOD's estimate of total cleanup liability, which includes only a portion of costs for PFAS cleanup, has increased from \$27.3 billion in 2016 to \$38.7 billion in 2022, an increase of 42 percent. However, DOD's request for cleanup funding has only increased from \$1.359 billion in 2016 to \$1.515 billion in the President's FY 2024 request, an increase of just 11 percent. This widening gap between cleanup funding and cleanup obligations will inevitably result in more delays, prolonged health risks for service members and their families, and ultimately more costly cleanups. It is past time to confront DOD's cleanup funding shortfall.

In addition to reducing the cleanup backlog, we urge you to provide the funding necessary to fully implement the Department's recently announced policy¹ on "interim actions" for PFAS contaminated sites. The new policy holds promise, but implementation must be fully funded to capitalize on opportunities for accelerated action. The policy requires DOD components to "assess where an interim action can be taken to mitigate further PFAS plume migration or ongoing impacts to groundwater, surface water, and/or sediment..." and to "prioritize implementation of interim actions as expeditiously as possible to address PFAS...". This new

¹ Memorandum signed July 11, 2023 by Brendan Owens, Assistant Secretary of Defense (EI&E) titled: Memorandum for Taking Interim Actions to Address Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Migration from DoD Installations and National Guard Facilities (<https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/eer/ecc/pfas/docs/policies/Memorandum-for-Taking-Interim-Actions-to-Address-PFAS-Migration-from-DoD-Installations-and-National-Guard-Facilities.pdf>)

policy gives hope to many communities impacted by contaminated sites who will otherwise likely wait decades for cleanups.

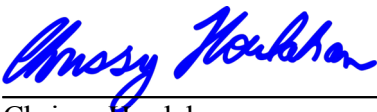
To ensure that adequate resources are available to accelerate cleanups, and to reduce DOD's backlog of contaminated sites, we request that you provide Congress a full accounting of expected cleanup costs for PFAS. A report was required by Sec. 348 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2022 and received in July 2022; however, this report only reflected cost estimates for actions already underway or planned. Sec. 348 explicitly required the estimated "costs to completion" of cleanups in addition to a cleanup schedule. This information is critically important as Congress considers the President's future budget requests and DOD appropriations.

We request that prior to December 30, 2023, the DOD provide Congress supplemental information to the July 2022 report regarding cost to completion, in addition to a detailed update on the implementation of the DOD's new "interim action" policy, including:

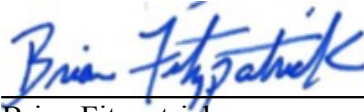
- the milestones established for completion of site-level assessments;
- a summary of the results of the site-level assessments that have been completed;
- the locations where interim actions have been identified;
- resources needed by DOD to fully implement the "interim action" policy; and
- locations of sites for which DOD has determined insufficient information is available to support interim actions, or for which DOD has determined that interim actions are not necessary or justified.

We are pleased that the Biden administration has made PFAS cleanup a government-wide priority. In that spirit, we strongly urge DOD to take the steps necessary to accelerate cleanups and reduce the backlog of contaminated sites, and to provide Congress with the information needed to carry out Congressional oversight and appropriations responsibilities.

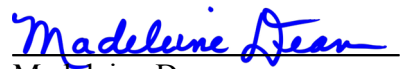
Sincerely,



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



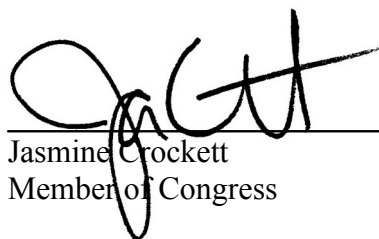
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



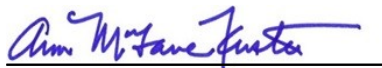
Elissa Slotkin
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Jasmine Crockett
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Abigail Davis Spanberger
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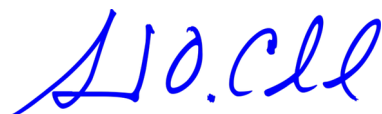
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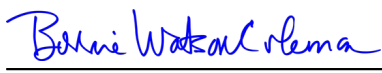
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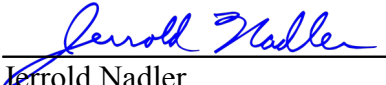
Michael V. Lawler
Member of Congress



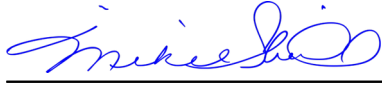
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Andy Kim
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Lizzie Fletcher
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