

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2019

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan  
Acting Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of the Administrator  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Acting Secretary Shanahan and Administrator Wheeler:

We write to you regarding an article published on March 14, 2019, in the *New York Times* citing that the Department of Defense (DOD) is requesting the White House adopt substantially weaker standards for groundwater pollution caused by per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) than those suggested by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If this reporting is accurate, the DOD's actions may endanger the health of servicemembers and families who live and work near the 401 military installations where there are known or suspected releases of PFAS chemicals in the drinking water or groundwater.<sup>1</sup> We urge you to act in the best interests of impacted communities and support efforts to develop groundwater and drinking water standards that will protect the public from the health hazards associated with PFAS contamination.

As you are aware, PFAS materials are a byproduct of aqueous film forming foam (AFFF), a fire suppressant agent used at military installations, and have been associated with a variety of adverse human health effects, including birth defects and immune system dysfunction. Given the significant public health concerns related to these chemicals, immediate action must be taken to reduce exposure to PFAS and address any potential negative health effects contamination from these materials may have on our communities.

On February 13, 2019, the EPA released its PFAS management plan, and committed to developing interim groundwater cleanup recommendations that will assist state and federal agencies in protecting drinking water supplies at sites contaminated by perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), two PFAS chemicals contained in formulations of AFFF. Regrettably, the *New York Times* and additional reports<sup>2</sup> suggest that the DOD has strongly opposed groundwater cleanup guidelines recommended by the EPA, and instead suggested that remedial action for PFOA and PFOS should not occur unless the concentration levels of these chemicals exceed 400 parts per trillion or higher. This value is nearly six times higher than the EPA's lifetime health advisory for these chemicals. Such

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018, September). Drinking Water: Status of DOD Efforts to Address Drinking Water Contaminants Used in Firefighting Foam. (Publication No. GAO-18-700T). Retrieved from GAO Reports Main Page via GPO Access database: <https://www.gao.gov/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/d/f/df1ec8c0-baab-4958-aaf9-](https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/d/f/df1ec8c0-baab-4958-aaf9-)

[eb1594e49524/9662C3E795CC2215BEE062423EF2ADD5.03-13-19-senator-carper-to-epa-002-.pdf](https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/d/f/df1ec8c0-baab-4958-aaf9-eb1594e49524/9662C3E795CC2215BEE062423EF2ADD5.03-13-19-senator-carper-to-epa-002-.pdf)

extreme contamination levels pose an unacceptable risk to impacted communities and would substantially limit the number of sites eligible for cleanup and remediation.

Setting a containment level that provides the highest level of safety for our servicemembers, military families and neighboring communities should be critical for this administration. This can only happen if the DOD and EPA are constructive partners. Therefore, we reiterate the request of our colleagues<sup>3</sup> and ask that you provide our offices with any communications your agencies have had with the White House as well as communications between DOD and EPA regarding the establishment of standards for PFAS chemicals and groundwater pollution related to these chemicals. We also request that the DOD and EPA provide a joint agency briefing to our offices and interested members on interagency efforts on this issue, as well as regular updates on the progress of those efforts.

As the leaders of agencies paramount to the safety and security of our nation, it is crucial that DOD and EPA work collaboratively to address the health and environmental challenges associated with PFAS. We thank you for your attention to this important matter and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



JEANNE SHAHEEN  
United States Senator



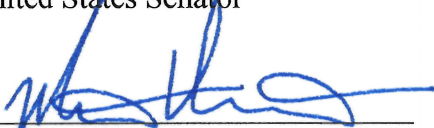
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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/e/1/e1bd72fd-d20f-439f-8cf7-50d84e64212e/90C9AD421BF2C45F763C1A8558109853.shanahan---03-06-19ltr-to-wheeler-pfas-action-plan.pdf](https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/e/1/e1bd72fd-d20f-439f-8cf7-50d84e64212e/90C9AD421BF2C45F763C1A8558109853.shanahan---03-06-19ltr-to-wheeler-pfas-action-plan.pdf)



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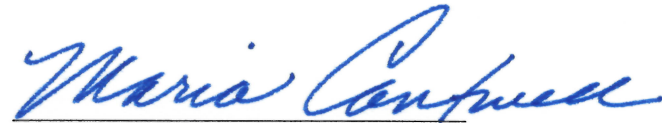
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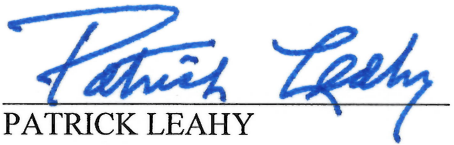
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