



TOXIC EXPOSURES

in the American Military

September 23, 2020

The Honorable Thom Tillis
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tillis:

The **Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) Coalition**, a non-partisan consortium of more than 30 veterans and military service organizations and experts, writes to express our support for the bipartisan language being advanced to markup on September 23, 2020, S. 4393, the *Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act of 2020*, as written on September 21, 2020. The stated goal of the TEAM Coalition is to reduce incidents of toxic exposures in the U.S. Military and increase access and quality of care for those made ill as the result of their military service. This comprehensive legislation represents the culmination of nearly two years of collaboration and consensus building by the organizations of the TEAM Coalition to establish priorities towards achieving that goal.

More than six million veterans of all eras have been exposed to toxic substances in the course of their military service such as herbicides, burn pits, radiation, engine fumes, and chemically laced improvised explosive devices and more. These exposures can potentially lead to serious illnesses including, but not limited to, cancers, respiratory diseases, autoimmune disorders, and skin conditions. Unfortunately, many veterans suffering from these illnesses still lack access to the lifesaving care they need and deserve.

If enacted, the TEAM Act would reform the way the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) evaluates and provides care for veterans suffering from conditions that may be associated with toxic exposures in the following ways:

- Grants VA health care enrollment in Priority Group 6 to veterans who served in areas of known toxic exposure and creates mechanisms for the enrollment of veterans who may be exposed to toxic substances in the future. Traditionally, VA health care eligibility is contingent on establishing a service-connected disability which can take months or even years. This provision will ensure that veterans who suffered toxic exposures get the care they need without delay.
- Reauthorizes on a permanent basis key provisions of the *Agent Orange Act*.
- Requires VA to respond to scientific evidence of associations between diseases and toxic exposures for the purposes of establishing presumptive disabilities.
- Establishes a commission to review toxic exposures in veterans and recommend independent studies to VA and Congress.
- Requires VA to enter into an agreement with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to study potential associations between diseases and toxic exposures in veterans.

- Grants every veteran access to their own Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record. This important provision will greatly improve veterans' understanding of their health care needs and assist them in applying for disability benefits.
- Improves training for VA health care and benefits employees on toxic exposure related issues.
- Adds questions about toxic exposures to VA primary care questionnaires.

The TEAM Coalition thanks you for your leadership on this issue, and for your continued commitment to ensuring that no veteran who was exposed to toxic substances during military service is left behind. We look forward to continuing to work with you to secure the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
The TEAM Coalition

Air Force Sergeants Association
 Association of the United States Navy
 California Communities Against Toxics
 Cease Fire Campaign
 Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS
 Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services
 Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States
 Fleet Reserve Association
 Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.
 HunterSeven Foundation
 The Independence Fund
 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
 Military Veterans Advocacy
 National Veterans Legal Services Program
 Stronghold Freedom Foundation
 Task Force Dagger Foundation
 Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
 TREA: The Enlisted Association
 Veteran Families for Exposure Awareness
 Veteran Warriors, Inc.
 Veterans of Foreign Wars
 VetsFirst
 Wounded Warrior Project

CC: The Honorable Jerry Moran
 Chairman, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee

The Honorable Jon Tester
 Ranking Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee