



## TOXIC EXPOSURES

in the American Military

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August 24, 2020

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Chairman, Armed Services Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Chairman, Armed Services Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Inhofe and Smith, and Ranking Members Reed and Thornberry:

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 certain toxic exposure-related provisions of the House and Senate-passed versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2021. 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.

In your work to reconcile differences between the House and Senate versions of the FY21 NDAA, the TEAM Coalition asks that you and the members of the Conference Committee ensure that the following provisions are included in the final version of the bill. All the undersigned organizations fully support each of these important provisions.

**S. 4049, the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*:**

- **Sec. 753:** *Access of veterans to Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record.*

Requires VA in consultation with DoD to provide veterans access to their own Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER). ILER supports clinical care and public health activities by searching for individuals and associating them to known toxic exposure events. Currently, only DoD and VA clinicians, VA claims adjudicators, and researchers have access to the ILER system. The TEAM coalition believes veterans have the right to know what they were exposed to during their military service. Granting veterans access to their own ILER records would greatly assist them with VA disability claims for conditions related to toxic exposures.

- **Sec. 754:** *Study on the incidence of cancer diagnosis and mortality among military aviators and aviation support personnel.*

Requires DoD to conduct a study to determine cancer incidence in military aircrew and aviation support personnel in comparison to the general population. If a higher incidence is found, DoD

must identify carcinogenic toxins and hazardous materials associated with flight operations, operating environments with exposure to increased radiation amounts, influence of factors such as duty stations, dates of service, and aircraft flown, and potential exposures due to service not related to aviation. We believe this data is critical to understanding the potential toxic exposure risks associated with military aviation duty.

- **Sec. 1090B:** *Additional diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents for which there is a presumption of service connection for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam.*

Requires VA to provide benefits on a presumptive basis to veterans suffering from Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism related to Agent Orange exposure. Vietnam veterans suffering from these conditions have been subject to delays based on repeated calls for further scientific research. This research has already been reviewed by the National Academy of Medicine, and we believe that veterans exposed to Agent Orange should be granted presumptive service connection for these conditions without further delay.

**H.R. 6395, the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021:**

- **Sec. 724:** *Pandemic health assessments evaluate exposure to open burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals.*

Requires DoD and VA to ask Service members and veterans who have tested positive for a virus designated by the federal government as a pandemic, including COVID-19, if they were previously exposed to burn pits, so their medical needs can be properly addressed and ensure they receive proper care. Service members and veterans exposed to toxic airborne chemicals or stationed near open burn pits will also be enrolled in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry unless they choose to opt out.

- **Sec. 742:** *Study on toxic exposure at Karshi–Khanabad Air Base, Uzbekistan.*

This study examining the health impacts of toxic contaminants and radiation on Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base veterans over 20 years is a critical, necessary first step in developing scientific data. The resulting data will be a basis for developing treatment paths and the basis for moving legislation for presumptive conditions for affected veterans.

- **Sec. 757-760:** *Important provisions on health care, documentation and research related to burn pit exposure.*

Requires the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand the Burn Pits Registry to include Egypt and Syria; requires mandatory training for all DoD medical providers on the potential health effects of burn pit exposure; requires DoD to include a separate, stand-alone question about burn pit exposure in the Post Deployment Health Assessment (DD Form 2796) to increase reporting of burn pit exposure; and requires DoD to provide a report to Congress on the status and timeline for completion of all studies being conducted or funded by DoD to assess the health effects of burn pits. It would also require DoD

to include potential challenges to completing studies and recommendations on how Congress can help DoD finish outstanding studies.

Messrs. Chairmen and Ranking Members, the TEAM Coalition thanks you for your steadfast commitment to the defense of our Nation and the well-being of its Service members. We ask that you support these important provisions and look forward to working with you and the members of the Conference Committee to ensure that each item is included in the final language of the FY21 NDAA.

Sincerely,

Air Force Sergeants Association  
AMVETS  
Association of the United States Navy  
Burn Pits 360  
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  
HunterSeven Foundation  
The Independence Fund  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
Military Veterans Advocacy, Inc.  
National Veterans Legal Services Program  
Stronghold Freedom Foundation  
Task Force Dagger Foundation  
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors  
TREA: The Enlisted Association  
United Soldiers and Sailors of America  
Veteran Warriors, Inc.  
Veterans Families for Exposure Awareness  
VetsFirst  
Wounded Warrior Project