



TOXIC EXPOSURES

in the American Military

March 22, 2021

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 *Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act*. If enacted, this legislation will expand health care eligibility and create a framework for establishing presumptive service connection for all military toxic exposures, now and in the future.

More than six million veterans of all eras have been exposed to toxic substances in the course of their military service. These include exposures to herbicides, burn pits, radiation, engine fumes, 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 no comprehensive framework exists to establish presumptive service connection for all conditions associated with toxic exposures, irrespective of era or location of service.

If enacted, the TEAM Act would reform the way the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) evaluates and provides care for all 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.
- 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.
- 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 addressing the toxic exposures-related illnesses of all veterans, now and in the future. We look forward to continuing to work with you to secure the passage of this critically important legislation.

Sincerely,

The TEAM Coalition

Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)
America's Warrior Partnership (AWP)
Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA)
Cease Fire Campaign
Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)
Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)
Green Beret Foundation
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. (GSW)
GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer
HunterSeven Foundation
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)
Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)
Military Veterans Advocacy, Inc. (MVA)
National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO)
National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP)
Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA)
The Independence Fund (TIF)
Reserve Organization of America (ROA)
Stronghold Freedom Foundation
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)
TREA: The Enlisted Association
United Soldiers and Sailors of America (USASOA)
Veteran Families for Education and Awareness (VFEA)
Veteran Warriors
VetsFirst, United Spinal Association
Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)