

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 20, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write today to urge the Department of Defense to solicit and incorporate perspectives from community leaders as the Department reexamines and revamps community engagement efforts, specifically Restoration Advisory Boards (RABs) and Restoration Advisory Committees (RACs), associated with Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) remediation strategies in New Hampshire and across the country.

Clean water is critical for our citizens to lead healthy lives, and it is at the heart of economic development, healthy families, and vibrant communities. PFAS contamination can cause long-term health complications for people who are exposed, and PFAS chemicals remain in our environment long after release, continuing to degrade our landfills and groundwater. Tragically, too many communities across the country have been exposed to PFAS contamination through drinking water sources, including communities on and surrounding active and former military installations.

On December 9, 2021, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee held a hearing to discuss the Department's efforts and progress on PFAS contamination remediation efforts as outlined in the Department of Defense's Inspector General Report, "Evaluation of the Department of Defense's Actions to Control Contaminant Effects from Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances at Department of Defense Installations" (DODIG-2021-105). Witnesses from the Department, including Richard Kidd, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment and Energy Resilience, appeared before the Committee, along with witnesses including New Hampshire PFAS community leader Andrea Amico, who testified about her firsthand experience fighting to address PFAS contamination at the former Pease Air Force Base, and Michigan's Tony Spaniola, who testified about the glacial pace of the Department's PFAS remediation efforts at the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base.

While we are encouraged that the Department of Defense is responding to congressional directives to address PFAS contamination, there is more work to be done with respect to working with, and listening to, affected communities. Mrs. Amico highlighted this at the hearing, stating, "Impacted communities would like to see improved relationships with local...restoration advisory boards and restoration advisory committees, focused on trust and collaboration. [...]" One suggestion I would have for [the Department] is to include some impacted community members as part of [RAB and RAC] training, and to give DOD some guidance on how to best work with communities." In his testimony, Mr. Spaniola also raised the importance of better interaction with communities, noting that "citizens are left out of this process; decisions are

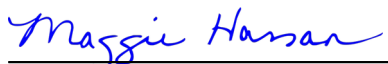
made without citizen input and, in the real world, citizens are the ones who live with the results and who actually have in many times the best ideas for resolving them.”

The Department operates community engagement programs, such as RABs and RACs, which serve as collaborative forums for communities, government agencies, tribes, and installation decision makers to discuss and determine the best community restoration strategies. During the December 9th hearing, Mr. Kidd acknowledged the need for the Department to better utilize RAB and RAC programs by “revisit[ing] the training we provide to our installations in terms of public outreach...and update[ing] our best practices guide so that we can get better outcomes in terms of community engagement.” For over 25 years, these bodies have served as a medium for the public to influence cleanup decisions and restorative efforts in their communities. We cannot let the opportunity pass to make real improvements in both Department programs, and in building trust and collaboration between the Department and our communities.

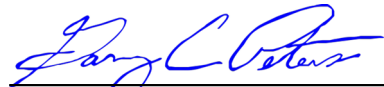
For those reasons, we urge you to solicit and incorporate input from community leaders and organizations as the Department improves RABs and RACs, and to listen to the priorities of those impacted as the Department carries out its statutorily-mandated efforts to keep communities across our nation safe from PFAS.

We appreciate your leadership and attention to this important matter, and we know that you share our concerns about this critical public health hazard facing Americans across the country. It is in that spirit that we make this recommendation, and we thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator