

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management
“The Federal Role in the Toxic PFAS Chemical Crisis”

September 26, 2018

Senator Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member

Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chairman, for working in a bipartisan way to convene today’s hearing.

In Michigan – we’ve seen firsthand the devastation a community experiences when they can’t trust the water coming out of the tap. In Flint, thousands of families were exposed to dangerous levels of lead in their water, and many residents still use filters and bottled water to ensure their water is safe.

Just over 100 miles north of Flint – residents of Oscoda, Michigan have spent years voicing their concerns about another serious environmental and public health threat in their drinking water – this time from highly-fluorinated chemicals – known as PFAS.

These chemicals are widely used in products like non-stick cookware, water-repellent clothing, stain-resistant upholstery, and many firefighting foams. They are extraordinarily persistent, meaning they don’t break down naturally in the environment. They accumulate in our soil, our water, our food, and too often, in our bodies. They are toxic – and they are not well regulated.

I’m grateful to Mr. LeRiche for being here today to talk about the impact of contamination on the community in Oscoda and the challenges residents face around the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base.

Unfortunately Oscoda is not alone – there are contaminated sites throughout Michigan and the nation.

Sandy Wynn-Stelt of Belmont, Michigan, who is here today, was exposed to one of the highest concentrations of these chemicals that has been identified in the United States – and now has PFAS levels in her blood that are more than 750 times the national average. Toby McNaughton is also here, also from Belmont. Her two year old son Jack has the highest documented PFAS levels known, at 484,000 parts per trillion. He’s two years old.

Families in Parchment Township, Michigan were forced to switch to bottled water earlier this summer – and now they fear that their children have been poisoned since birth.

As a Senator from Michigan – a state surrounded by the Great Lakes – the world’s largest source of surface freshwater – I’m appalled by the number of water crises we’ve faced. My constituents – and people across the country facing this crisis – are fed up as well. Mr. Chairman, I request

permission to enter in the record a few statements from Michiganders urging swift actions on fluorinated chemicals.

I asked for this hearing because I believe that everyone in this great country should have access to safe drinking water – and I want to do everything I can to ensure the federal government is effectively managing this crisis.

Soon the Senate will approve an FAA bill that includes my language to remove federal mandates requiring the use of these chemicals in firefighting foams. I've also worked with my colleagues to urge EPA to swiftly establish national enforceable standards to enable longer term clean-up – I look forward to hearing more from EPA today. These are important bipartisan steps – but they are just the beginning.

I look forward to hearing more today about what federal agencies are doing – and what more they can do – and what Congress must do – to identify contamination, prevent exposure, reduce harm to human health, and to expedite clean-up and assistance for affected communities.