

Testimony of Cathy Wusterbarth

Chairman Peters, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Cathy Wusterbarth. I am a founder of Need Our Water, Oscoda Citizens for Clean Water and a community leader with Great Lakes PFAS Action Network.

I am a Registered Dietitian, clean water advocate and a native of my beloved town of Oscoda Michigan. I was a competitive swimmer and young lifeguard on the USAF Base beach which we know now is highly contaminated with PFAS. Little did I know that the cancer and immunological disease I developed a few years later in my 20's may have been due to the drinking water and lake water exposure from performing that lifeguarding job as a civilian employee for the USAF. To this day I continue to battle these diseases much like my mother, father and both sisters who have lifetime illnesses potentially associated with their PFAS exposure. Unfortunately, our family in Oscoda is not unique. Military personnel, their families and our neighbors are reporting the same conditions, sadly some cases have led to preventable death.

I am proud to be a part a community that supported the former Wurtsmith Air Force base functions and continue to be proud of the mission of the Department of Defense (DOD) to provide combat credible military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our nation.

However, at the same time as providing these important services to our national security, toxic PFAS has been flowing essentially uninterrupted for decades from the former Wurtsmith Base through the groundwater. This toxic PFAS contamination is bleeding into nearby Van Etten Lake, Clark's Marsh and the AuSable River-all of which carry that toxic water to the drinking water source for hundreds of thousands of people in the Great Lakes region. In 2015-2016 testing of the Lake Huron municipal water system revealed 4.2 parts per trillion of PFOA and PFOS combined for the sampling. We have health advisories throughout our community due to this uncontrolled spread of PFAS, including foam, fish, venison, and all animals living in Clark's Marsh-which used to be a popular fishing and hunting destination and is still used by subsistence hunters and anglers to gather food.

Because it is odorless, colorless and tasteless we unknowingly were subjected to these toxic PFAS chemicals for decades and continued to be exposed for decades after PFAS manufacturers and the military knew PFAS chemicals were harmful to human health. Shockingly, we now have the visual evidence in the PFAS-laden foam forming on our waterways and Lake Huron. After over a decade of knowing PFAS chemicals were impacting our health and community-the past exposure we experienced still has no comprehensive corrective measure. We must live the best we can with the harm caused and must do so while enduring a lack of transparency, accountability, and collaboration from the Air Force and DOD as part of the clean-up process.

Through Need Our Water's continued partnership with Wurtsmith site experts, The National Wildlife Federation, community members and Wurtsmith veterans I was involved with creating a document that summarizes the timeline of PFAS exposure and actions at Wurtsmith. Starting in the 1970's, it details the DOD actions that are inconsistent with the known severity of the problem, false promises and endless delays. This well researched, clearly detailed and thoughtful document was submitted by me at the September 2021 Restoration Advisory Board meeting. During the meeting when I asked for a formal response to this document, the USAF leadership asked me why I would ask for a response to a public

document. As part of my testimony, I will submit this document for the committee to review. This incident is an example of the shift that needs to occur in USAF and DOD approach. Communities have vital information to provide, and we should not be dismissed when it is presented.

Through my advocacy I've learned to study the actions of those doing this work before me such as the late author of Silent Spring, Rachel Carson. She said, which ironically could be posed to the DoD in literal terms today, "Man's attitude toward nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself. We're challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves."

Thank you.