

**Testimony of Joanne Stanton**  
**on**  
**PFAS: the View from Affected Citizens and States**  
**Before the**  
**Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works**  
**June 9, 2021**

Good morning. My name is Joanne Stanton. I grew up in Warminster, Pa., about two miles down the road from two separate military bases that used aqueous film-forming foam, the foam used by firefighters.

My PFAS story started when I was a young mother. I was naïve. I thought that if water came out of my kitchen faucet, it had to be safe. I had no idea just how weak our chemical laws are, and how many untested and unregulated chemicals, like PFAS, can easily make their way into our drinking water. I learned the hard way how important our environmental laws are in safeguarding our health, especially the health of our children.

Seven years ago, my community of Warminster was devastated to discover that our drinking water had been highly contaminated with PFAS for 50 years, with some of the highest levels of PFAS pollution ever detected from public drinking water wells.

I started to read everything I could get my hands on about PFAS. When I began researching the health effects, I learned that some of these chemicals can cross the placenta and affect a developing fetus. Animal studies showed they caused tumors, cancer, neurodevelopmental problems and even second-generation health effects.

The magnitude of what I was uncovering hit me like a ton of bricks. I vividly remember the day I realized what I was reading, falling to my knees and crying, as my mind raced back to when my oldest son was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor at age 6.

Back then, after my son's brain surgery, epidemiologists came into our hospital room and began pummeling my husband and me with very pointed questions: Where do you live?, they wanted to know. Where was your early pregnancy? Have you or your husband ever worked with chemicals or pesticides? They told us they'd found embryonic tissue in the center of my son's cancerous tumor. That meant it had started to form during my pregnancy.

There are three of us who grew up in Warminster – on the same street, in fact, within a few houses of each other. All three of us have children of our own with brain tumors. All of them were cancerous, and all of them had embryonic tissue at the core. Doctors immediately

questioned our environmental exposures, and we realized we all drank PFAS-contaminated water throughout our entire childhood, and we all drank it during our pregnancies.

As a mother, it was gut wrenching for me to be told that my exposure might have caused my child's cancer. But what truly sickened me was learning that both the Defense Department and the chemical manufacturers had known since the 1970s just how poisonous PFAS are. Yet they chose to be silent. They *chose* to watch people in the surrounding communities get sick, and in some cases die, without warning us.

I then came to find that the EPA also knew, and had known since 1998, just how toxic PFAS are. The EPA too failed to protect us.

Where does that leave us today?

In my town, where I grew up, there are 3-year-olds today with kidney cancer who may never get a chance to do something as simple as ride a bike and put their first tooth under their pillow. There are new moms who don't feel they can safely breastfeed their babies because of the high levels of PFAS in their breast milk.

And today the Defense Department is refusing to clean up legacy pollution across the country.

It's been eight years since we learned about PFAS at our two military sites, yet the chemicals are still polluting our public waterways. Within the past couple of years, PFAS groundwater levels on base measured 329,500 ppt – 4,000 times EPA's health advisory for drinking water. And discharge levels coming off base were more than 3,000 ppt, levels far exceeding limits set in temporary discharge permits. Yet no one – *no one* – seems to have the power to hold them accountable.

How can this be?

It's the EPA's job to regulate chemicals, to set safe drinking water standards, and to hold polluters accountable – even when the polluter is the Department of Defense.

And it's your job to hold EPA accountable when the agency fails to act. You have the power to change the course of history.

You have the power to protect people like me.

**You have the power to designate PFAS a hazardous substance under CERCLA**, as Chairman Carper has proposed in the PFAS Action Act, which will ensure that PFAS pollution in communities like mine is treated as an urgent priority.

**You have the power to set a two-year deadline for a federal drinking water standard for PFAS**, as Senator Capito proposed in the Protect Drinking Water from PFAS Act, to ensure that my community, and all communities across the country, has safe drinking water. Why should my

neighbors in New Jersey, where state regulators have set a drinking water standard for PFAS, have safer drinking water than the people in my town in Pennsylvania?

**You have the power to finally regulate industrial releases of PFAS**, as Senator Gillibrand proposed in the Clean Water Standards for PFAS Act. In my community, it is perfectly legal for companies to discharge PFAS into the air our children breathe and the water our children drink with no restrictions at all.

**You have the power to set deadlines to clean up PFAS at military installations**, precisely what Senator Gillibrand's Fifty Filthy Act would provide to military communities like mine.

My story is not unique. There are thousands of personal stories like mine across the country. Stories of cancer, chronic illness, anger, frustration, loss of income, loss of home value, loss of family pets.

But worst of all has been the loss of hope, all at the hands of PFAS.

On a personal note, my son was one of the lucky ones. He survived cancer. But it didn't come without a price. As a mother, watching my bright and vibrant child slowly fade into a disabled adult has been one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Today he's in his 30s and still lives at home with us. He can't drive. He probably won't marry or have children, or experience many of the joys in life we had dreamed of for him. I now realize that stronger regulations governing environmental pollutants like PFAS could have prevented needless suffering for many, many people in my community.

It may be too late for my son, but it's not for the other kids of this country. ***But our children can't afford to wait another minute.***

When you fully understand how grave the public health threats associated with these chemicals are, you begin to wonder how this level of harm could have occurred in a country with as high standards for public health as the United States of America.

But it turns out, the DOD is one of the largest polluters in our country. It's ironic that the very entity whose job it is to protect the American people ended up giving a lot of Americans cancer and other diseases because of their irresponsibility in handling toxic chemicals.

You have the power to hold both the DOD and the EPA accountable. You have the power to change the way things are and ensure that our children and grandchildren – and generations to come – are better protected than we are. As a mother, I implore you to act on PFAS with URGENCY and ACTION. Thank you.