

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 7, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dr. Robert Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Wilkie, Acting Administrator Wheeler and Director Redfield:

We write to request that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) assist the State of Illinois in addressing the latest Legionnaires' disease diagnosis at the Illinois Veterans Home (IVH) in Manteno in Kankakee County, Illinois. We also request that the VA, EPA and CDC accept the State of Illinois' invitation to participate in the Illinois Legionnaires' Task Force, which was recently established by Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

The tragic death of a Veteran that may have resulted from Legionnaires' disease acquired while living at IVH Manteno is a sobering reminder of the need to marshal public resources to urgently address the daunting public health challenge posed by Legionella contamination.

As with prior outbreaks in Illinois, the VA, CDC and EPA can and should continue to serve in an important and supportive role, providing Federal expertise and assistance to help the Legionnaires' Task Force identify how the IVH-Manteno water supply was contaminated with the bacterium Legionella and develop a specific set of actions to fix the problem and prevent future contamination.

Federal support is warranted because corrective actions, from personnel training to equipment upgrades, are often complex and at-risk for implementation errors. The dedicated civil servants at VA, EPA and CDC are among the foremost experts in handling this type of public health and environmental challenge. We request that your respective agency's experts assist the Legionnaires' Task Force in safeguarding the health and well-being of Veterans in Illinois.

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In addition, since this public health challenge is not limited to Illinois, we urge the VA, EPA and CDC to carefully examine existing Federal statutes, regulations and policies, and provide Congress with actionable recommendations and if necessary, legislative proposals that would strengthen and modernize Federal guidance provided to State authorities with respect to preventing water contamination.

Thank you in advance for reviewing our request and we look forward to receiving regular updates on the status of VA, EPA and CDC efforts, in coordination with any other relevant Federal entities, to assist the Illinois Legionnaires' Task Force in protecting Americans who served our country in uniform.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator