

August 2, 2022

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL URGES CONGRESS TO PASS THE PACT ACT
Raoul Leads Coalition Calling for Passage of Federal Legislation That Would Expand Medical Coverage for Millions of Veterans Exposed to Toxins

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul led a coalition of nine attorneys general urging the U.S. Senate to pass proposed legislation that would expand health care coverage to millions of veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other military toxins.

[In a letter to Senators Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell](#), Raoul and the coalition urge passage of [S. 3373](#), which would expand health care eligibility to post-Sept. 11 combat veterans, including more than 3.5 million veterans exposed to toxins. The proposal would also add 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to the federal Department of Veterans' Affairs' list of service connection presumptions, and create a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure. Raoul and the coalition are calling for the passage of S. 3373, the PACT Act, after the measure failed to pass the U.S. Senate when it was called for a vote July 27.

"Veterans risked their lives in defense of our country, and too many suffer from long-term health conditions after being exposed to toxins during their service. It is past time the federal government kept its promise to the brave men and women who have made sacrifices many of us cannot imagine," Raoul said. "I urge the U.S. Senate to take action today and show America's veterans that our commitment to them doesn't stop when their deployment ends."

For decades, the Department of Defense (DOD) utilized open-air burn pits to dispose of garbage, paint, plastics, jet fuel and human waste generated on military bases overseas. The burning of these contaminants released an array of pollutants into the air, including known carcinogens and particulate matter. Active burn pits existed as recently as the military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the DOD has now closed most burn pits, closure has not prevented veterans from becoming ill years after exposure. Medical conditions linked to burn pit exposure include a host of cancers affecting the head, neck, kidneys, brain and pancreas. They have also resulted in veterans being diagnosed with emphysema and asthma after service.

Attorney General Raoul's Military and Veterans Rights Bureau handles a wide variety of financial and legal concerns affecting service members and veterans, such as military employment rights, consumer fraud and scams connected with benefits provided by the VA. Military service members, veterans and their families can visit Raoul's [Military and Veterans Rights Bureau website](#) or contact Raoul's Military and Veterans Rights Helpline for assistance by email at mvr@ilag.gov or by calling 1-800-382-3000 or 1-800-964-3013 (TTY). Service members and veterans who believe they have been a victim of a fraud can also contact the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Bureau at 1-800-386-5438 in Chicago, 1-800-243-0618 in Springfield and 1-800-243-0607 in Carbondale.

Joining Raoul in signing the letter are the attorneys general of California, Delaware, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

KWAME RAOUL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

August 1, 2022

Via U.S. Mail and E-mail

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Military Toxic Exposure

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

As a nation, we sent our service members overseas and exposed them to battlefields. We exposed them to the enemy and to toxins each and every day. They fulfilled their commitment to this country and it is our responsibility to uphold our part. We ask Congress to pass S. 3373 and help those who were exposed to burn pits and other military toxins.

For decades, the Department of Defense used open-air burn pits to dispose of garbage, paint, plastics, jet fuel, and human waste generated on military bases overseas. More than 250 burn pits existed in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹ They released an array of pollutants into the air, including particulate matter and known carcinogens.

In 2010, Congress banned the military from using pits except when there were no other options. The Department of Defense has closed most burn pits and plans on closing the rest.

¹ DAV, Military Toxic Exposures <https://www.dav.org/veterans/resources/military-toxic-exposures/#:~:text=Some%20veterans%20who%20have%20suffered,however%2C%20true%20for%20a1%20veterans.>

Even though the DOD has now closed most burn pits, that has not prevented veterans from becoming ill years after exposure.²

From 2007-2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs has denied almost 80 percent of all disability claims related to military toxic exposure. This is concerning because the VA estimates 3.5 million veterans were exposed to toxins while in the military.³ Since 2020, the VA has worked with the veteran community to document potential exposures and health outcomes. But without the actions of Congress, veterans will not receive needed healthcare, benefits and resources.

Over the past year, multiple pieces of legislation have been introduced to help our veterans harmed by toxic exposure. Recently, members of Congress have reached bipartisan agreement on the Protecting Our Gold Star Families Education Act (Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act)).

The passing of the PACT Act will expand VA health care eligibility to Post 9/11 combat veterans, which includes the more than 3.5 million toxic-exposed veterans. It will add 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to the federal Department of Veterans' Affairs list of service connection presumptions and create a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure. This bill not only ensures benefits and healthcare for Post 9/11 veterans, but for those exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War era.

For decades, veterans have been asking for healthcare to treat ailments and illnesses caused by military toxic exposure. We urge Congress to pass S. 3373. As public servants to the veteran populations in our states, we understand the responsibility to take care of those who have served within the ranks of the military. Now is the time for Congress to keep its promise to those who have served our country.

Respectfully,



KWAME RAOUL
Attorney General of Illinois

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Public Health, Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/>.

³ Statement of Laurie Carson, Deputy Executive Director, Compensation Service, VBA, VA <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/111024/witnesses/HHRG-116-VR09-Wstate-CarsonL-20200923.pdf>.



ROBERT BONTA
Attorney General of California



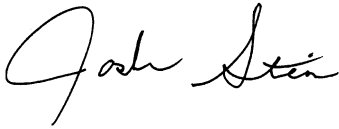
KATHLEEN JENNINGS
Attorney General of Delaware



TOM MILLER
Attorney General of Iowa



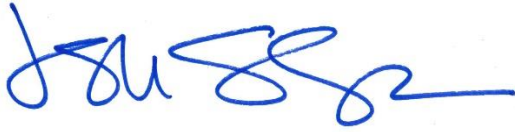
KEITH ELLISON
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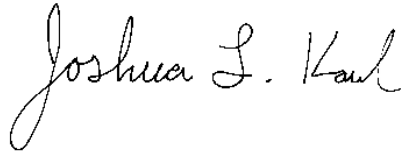
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