# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 19, 2018

Linda S. Birnbaum, Ph.D., D.A.B.T., A.T.S.
Director
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
National Toxicology Program
P.O. Box 12233, Mail Drop B2-01
Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709

Dear Director Birnbaum,

On September 26, 2018, you testified before the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management that the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) had yet to investigate the ties between pediatric cancer and exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). We applaud NIEHS' recent grant announcement to fund research that will evaluate potential harmful effects on the immune systems of young children exposed to PFAS, which will include children living near the Pease International Tradeport in Portsmouth, NH. In addition to prioritizing similar research, we request that NIEHS ensure that studies investigating the negative associations between pediatric PFAS exposure and immune function include a focus on the chemicals' connection with pediatric cancer. We also urge you to explore whether variations in pediatric cancers found in New Hampshire are tied to PFAS as you assist the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) in conducting the proof-of-concept model study at Pease and the national multi-site study of PFAS health effects.

As you are aware, several Granite State communities have been exposed to high levels of PFAS chemicals due their legacy uses in commercial and industrial applications, including non-stick coating for cookware and aqueous film forming foam. While the risks associated with PFAS exposure are still being uncovered, studies have linked these chemicals to number of adverse health effects. For instance, a draft toxicological study[1] recently published by the ATSDR suggested that exposure to certain PFAS chemicals may leave children susceptible to immune system damage, which could play a detrimental role in the human body's ability to fight off cell infections that cause diseases including cancers.

In June 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a report[2] detailing variation in pediatric cancer rates by state, which indicated that between 2003 and 2014, New Hampshire had the highest pediatric cancer rate in the country—with 205 pediatric cancer cases per 1,000,000 in the population. In addition, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services published a report

[1] Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). 2018. Toxicological profile for Perfluoroalkyls. (Draft for Public Comment). Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.
[2] Siegel DA, Li J, Henley SJ, et al., "Geographic Variation in Pediatric Cancer Incidence — United States, 2003–2014," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report,* 2018; 67:707–713. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6725a2

in February 2016 that determined there to be a small cluster of pediatric rhabdomyosarcoma and pleuropulmonary blastoma cancer cases among residents living in five towns in the Seacoast region. Notably, four of these towns have reported elevated levels of PFAS either in drinking water, groundwater or surface water sources.

In response to the CDC's report, we sent a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar on July 16, 2018, to request that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) examine the factors that are contributing to high pediatric cancer rates in New Hampshire and other states, including environmental contamination. On August 30, 2018, as a part of the Department's response to our letter, the Department noted that "ATSDR is working to address PFAS exposure and health concerns in New Hampshire." We would appreciate continued interagency efforts within HHS, including activity from NIEHS, to examine linkages between PFAS and high pediatric cancer rates.

New Hampshire parents are extremely concerned about what exposure to PFAS chemicals means for the health and safety of their children. As this administration moves forward with the nationwide health study on PFAS, we urge NIEHS to work with relevant environmental and health agencies to determine whether environmental contamination from this family of chemicals is a contributing factor to the incidences of pediatric cancer found in New Hampshire and across the nation. We thank you for your attention to this important matter and look forward to working closely with you to ensure that New Hampshire children and all Americans are better protected from cancer risks.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Robert Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Dr. Francis Collins, National Institutes of Health
Dr. Patrick Breysse, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
Dr. Norman Sharpless, National Cancer Institute