

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 16, 2018

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued a report¹ 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. As you may be aware, New Hampshire health officials have also identified a pediatric cancer cluster on New Hampshire’s Seacoast. We are extremely troubled by this finding and write to request information on actions by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and relevant subagencies² that have been taken recently or are in progress to examine the underlying factors, including environmental contamination, that are contributing to high pediatric cancer rates in New Hampshire and other states.

We are very concerned by the potential damaging public health impacts that exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) can have on the health and wellbeing of Granite Staters. We were alarmed by findings in a draft toxicological study recently published by the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR), which 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. Other environmental factors and exposure to carcinogens, such as radon, can also increase cancer risk. In light of the potential for contaminants and environmental factors to contribute to rising pediatric cancer rates, we strongly encourage the Department and its subagencies to continue to examine potential links.

Given the enormous stakes connected to identifying the root causes of rising pediatric cancer rates, we are requesting the following information:

1. Any information specific to contributing factors to pediatric cancers in New Hampshire that may differ from contributing factors in other states.

¹ 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>

² Including, but not limited to the CDC, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

2. Details on any planned action of the Department to address contributing factors related to pediatric cancer rates in states like New Hampshire that may differ from contributing factors in other states, as well as planned action to combat rising pediatric cancer rates.
3. Details on community outreach and engagement opportunities for Granite Staters to receive information related to pediatric cancer health concerns.

We also request that the Department provide briefings for the New Hampshire delegation and other interested Congressional offices on the Department's efforts on this issue, as well as regular updates on the progress of those efforts.

Without a stronger interagency commitment to determining the causes and potential solutions to the growth in pediatric cancer prevalence, we will not be able to ensure that New Hampshire children and all Americans are better protected from cancer risks. We look forward to working with you to address this troubling development.

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 Breyse, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
Dr. Norman Sharpless, National Cancer Institute
Dr. Linda Birnbaum, National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences