



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

April 12, 2024

Dear Torchlight Initiative:

Thank you for your January 17, 2024, letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding reports of increased cancer rates among Veterans and Service members in the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Community, to include at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana. VA is committed to promoting the health and readiness of Veterans and Service members and takes reports of toxic exposure seriously.

We share your desire to ensure the best health maintenance, screening, research, surveillance, care, and treatment for our Service members and Veterans. As part of one of VA's largest expansions of Veteran health care and benefits, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022 created a new subchapter VII in 38 U.S.C. Ch. 11, which established a process by which we can identify or modify presumptions of service connection based on toxic exposures. We are treating your letter as a petition pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 553(e) for the issuance of a rule and it has been routed to the Military Environmental Exposure Sub-Committee which reviews potential cases of toxic exposure and develops recommendations for cases that warrant formal evaluation. See 38 U.S.C. § 1172(c)(d). We will continue to gather as much science and evidence as possible to move swiftly for Veterans facing serious illnesses due to military exposures.

We will provide a final response to your request for a presumptive rule at the conclusion of the process outlined by the PACT Act. See 38 U.S.C. §§ 1172-1174. In the interim, we encourage Veterans to submit a claim if they believe their disability is related to their military service. Regardless of whether a presumption exists or is eventually created, service connection can also potentially be granted on a direct basis using all relevant lay and medical evidence.

If Veterans have any questions or concerns about their current benefits, please have them contact our toll-free number at 1-800-827-1000 to speak with a trained claims representative. PACT Act resources may be found at www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits.

Thank you for your interest and concern for the health of our Service members and Veterans and for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shereef Elnahal".

Shereef Elnahal, M.D., MBA
Under Secretary for Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joshua Jacobs".

Joshua Jacobs
Under Secretary for Benefits