



February 21, 2024

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

On behalf of the Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network (BCAN) and the Veteran patients, caregivers, and families that we work with, I am writing to express our sincerest appreciation for the proposed changes to *§ 3.309 Diseases Subject to Presumptive Service Connection*. As the CEO of BCAN, the nation's oldest and largest bladder cancer patient advocacy organization, I commend the Department of Veterans Affairs for extending the deployment areas and date ranges for presumed exposure to herbicides encountered while serving our country, particularly as it relates to bladder cancer.

Bladder cancer, the fourth-most commonly diagnosed cancer in our veteran community, impacts countless brave men and women who served in areas now addressed by this extension of coverage. Your recognition of this fact is a crucial step towards alleviating the burdens placed upon our veterans, who have had to endure the arduous task of proving their exposure to certain herbicidal agents to tie it to their diagnosis. Time and time again, we hear from Vietnam and modern warfare era veterans across the country who are dealing with numerous challenges as a result of their bladder cancer diagnosis, highlighting the urgent need for this inclusion.

Furthermore, I would like to bring to your attention the plight of over three million veterans who were exposed to open burn pits used for waste disposal during military deployments in Southwest Asia since 1990. The hazardous combination of benzene-based jet fuel and various other materials burned in these pits poses a serious risk for developing bladder cancer among those who served nearby. As research into the health outcomes of this exposure is ongoing, we urge the Veterans Administration to add bladder cancer to the list of presumptive conditions tied to burn pit exposure in our veterans and look forward to working with the VA to that end.

By taking these necessary steps, we acknowledge the occupational and environmental risks faced by our brave servicemen and women, past and present. Your commitment to their well-being and the recognition of their sacrifices do not go unnoticed.

Thank you once again for your dedication to our veterans and their families. I look forward to seeing bladder cancer added to the list of presumptive conditions tied to burn pit exposure, and I am confident that together, we can continue to make strides towards better care and support for those who have served our country.

Sincerely,

Andrea Maddox-Smith
Chief Executive Officer