

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairwoman Murray, and Vice Chair Collins,

We write with the utmost urgency regarding the impending sunset of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). It is imperative that S. 3853, the *Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act*, legislation that recently passed the Senate on a 69-30 vote, be attached to the upcoming fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations package.

As you know, Congress first enacted RECA in 1990 to provide benefits for Americans adversely affected by the U.S. government's testing of atomic weapons. These benefits have been made available to certain individuals who developed specific cancers or other diseases due to their participation in an atmospheric atomic weapons test, presence within certain areas near such weapons tests (commonly referred to as "downwinders"), or their work mining or transporting uranium. Unfortunately, the long-term ramifications of the federal government's atomic research continue to harm Americans today, far beyond the scope of current law. RECA's authorization is currently scheduled to sunset on June 7, 2024, and this program must be renewed and reformed.

In Missouri, nuclear waste from these projects that was discarded in the 1960s has resulted in radioactive contamination spreading throughout the greater St. Louis area, including St. Louis County and St. Charles County. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) continues to find previously unknown areas where radioactive waste has leaked from the Westlake Landfill, an EPA Superfund site on the National Priorities List.¹ In 2021, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources warned the U.S. Department of Energy that contamination levels have not improved at the Weldon Spring Site in St. Charles County, where the federal


¹ Allison Kite. March 29, 2023. "EPA finds radioactive contamination in more areas of West Lake Landfill." *Missouri Independent*. <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/03/29/epa-finds-radioactive-contamination-in-more-areas-of-west-lake-landfill/>


government refined uranium, that sits less than a mile from a highschool.² Contamination has also been found in a residential waterway, Coldwater Creek, resulting in the closure of a nearby elementary school.³ The federal government’s own health investigators have found that this waste has contributed to significantly increased cancer risks for residents, including children.⁴ Specifically, in 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry released a report finding an increased risk of bone cancer, lung cancer, and leukemia.⁵ Missourians have been living and continue to live in unimaginable fear that they and their loved ones will contract fatal illnesses due to their government’s mistakes.


Missourians, and all Americans affected, deserve restitution from the government for this harm. On March 7, 2024, S. 3853 passed the Senate with overwhelming, bipartisan support.⁶ This legislation would not only reauthorize RECA, but also expand benefits to residents, workers, and students of twenty-one Missouri ZIP codes in and around where the federal government discarded radioactive waste. These benefits would include compensation for documented out-of-pocket medical expenses for specified diseases such as leukemia, multiple myeloma, lymphoma, and certain cancers. Benefits would also be extended to the beneficiaries of deceased individuals.

With RECA’s authorization expiring in less than three months, time is of the essence. Therefore, we emphatically request that S. 3853 be attached to the upcoming FY2024 appropriations package.

Sincerely,


Ann Wagner
Member of Congress


Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress


Cori Bush
Member of Congress


Mark Alford
Member of Congress

² Allison Kite. July 17, 2023. “Missouri warned feds in 2021 radioactive contamination of groundwater wasn’t improving.” *Missouri Independent*. <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/07/17/missouri-warned-feds-in-2021-radioactive-contamination-of-groundwater-wasnt-improving/>

³ Justina Coronel. March 23, 2023. “Jana Elementary not expected to reopen, school district announces.” *KSDK*. <https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/special-reports/radioactive/jana-elementary-not-expected-to-reopen/63-7457e189-4a76-49d5-898b-a1b472ba1a98>

⁴ Michael Pfillis and Jim Salter. July 12, 2023. “How America’s push for the atomic bomb spawned enduring radioactive waste problems in St. Louis.” *The Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/nuclear-waste-cancer-st-louis-army-corps-school-9e1ceb765822fc53fcbc2e42005adef2>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ S. 3853. 118th Congress. *Radiation Exposure Compensation Act*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3853/all-actions>