

February 9, 2022

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass,  
Chair Health and Government Operations Committee  
House Office Building, Room 241  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**House Bill 275 – Environment – PFAS Chemicals – Prohibitions and Requirements  
Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Committee:

My husband, George Walter Taylor was 46 years old when he died. We were married for almost 20 years. I came from a family heavily involved in the fire/rescue service – both career and volunteer, so we were the perfect match. I am a nurse, so in addition to sharing intense working hours, I share his commitment to helping others. Together we raised 4 children and spoiled 2 grandchildren – whose ages ranged from 1 to 20 at the time of his death. Walter spent 31 years of his life in the fire service, starting at the age of 15 and ending the moment he took his last breath.

As a career and paid fireman, Walter was a strong advocate in protecting the health and safety of his fellow firefighters. He knew the apparent dangers they faced and the dangers on the job that were unseen. He knew they were being diagnosed with medical problems and various cancers attributed to their multiple exposures to harmful chemicals and substances. In particular, he knew about the risk of exposure to pre- polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which he, and his colleagues were exposed to in some of the firefighting foams they used, in the air when consumer products like rugs, carpets and upholstery burned, and even from their gear, which is coated in these chemicals.

Walter's lifetime exposure to PFAS was 31 years. His use of AFFF and exposure to combustible materials on the fireground, all while wearing his turnout gear resulted in devastating consequences to him and our family. In May 2018, Walter was diagnosed with Stage IV Metastatic Neuroendocrine Cancer. For two years, we tried various treatments to decrease the spread of his cancer with no success. Walter died on Monday, Memorial Day, May 25, 2020, peacefully with all of us at his side. His autopsy listed the cause of death as Metastatic Neuroendocrine Cancer related to occupational exposures.

Walter is not alone. According to the International Association of Firefighters, cancer is the leading line of duty cause of death for firefighters, with 75% of firefighter deaths from occupational cancers. I can't bring Walter back, but we owe it to him and the families of Walter's fellow firefighters to do everything we can to reduce their exposure to PFAS and other cancer-causing chemicals. Doing so will help not only our firefighters and their families, but all of us. Firefighters like Walter are the canary in the coalmine for these chemicals which are putting all of us risk as they make their way into the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat.

Since Walter's passing, his oldest daughter, Miranda has given birth to our third granddaughter. Our daughter Kayla is a paid EMT/volunteer firefighter that is getting married this year to a firefighter. Our son Justin is a volunteer firefighter aspiring to be a paid firefighter. Our youngest daughter Mackenzie celebrated her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday last week and has dreams of being a firefighter, "just like Daddy". We know that Walter is always watching over us, but our desire for him to physically be here breaks our hearts on even the happiest of days.

Fortunately, we have a chance to help protect Walter's fellow firefighters and Maryland families from ever having to feel the pain, hurt and loss that my children and I feel every day. The George "Walter" Taylor Act will stop the use of these dangerous chemicals in rug and carpets, food packaging, and ensure they switch to safer alternatives for firefighting foam. This bill will also require notification for all firefighting gear that contains PFAS chemicals. I am calling on everyone to support SB273/HB275 to protect the lives of our firefighting brothers and sisters, so they can continue to protect your life and the lives of Maryland families.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Christine Taylor