



Office of the Speaker **THERESE M. TERLAJE**

I Mina'trentai Sais na Liheslaturan Guåhan | 36th Guam Legislature
Committee on Health, Land, Justice and Culture

Congress RECA bills could improve benefits for Guam cancer patients

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (September 23, 2021 – Hagåtña, Guam) Two bills including Guam as a nuclear fallout downwinder in the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) were introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on September 22, 2021. The original RECA legislation covered those affected by nuclear fallout during atmospheric testing in Nevada and the Marshall Islands, and the new bills introduced in Congress amend it to expand eligibility and improve compensation and benefits.

The original RECA legislation, signed in 1990, did not include Guam as a “downwinder” or area affected by nuclear fallout. Mr. Robert N. Celestial, President of the Pacific Association of Radiation Survivors (PARS) and others gave written and oral testimony in 2004 to the Board on Radiation Effects Research (BRER) Committee to address Guam’s RECA eligibility. Celestial’s testimony, in conjunction with other testimonies like those provided by Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo, Dr. Chris Perez, and U.S. Navy Lieutenant Charles Bert Schreiber convinced the BRER Committee to conclude in 2005 that Guam residents did receive measurable fallout during the period of U.S. nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific from 1946 to 1962.

S. 2798 was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) with eight co-sponsors. The House of Representatives bill was introduced by Representative Teresa Leger Fernández (D-NM) and 14 co-sponsors including Guam’s Delegate Michael F.Q. San Nicolas. The bills would extend coverage to claimants in Guam for the Pacific test sites; increase RECA awards for “downwinders” from \$50,000 to \$150,000; provide coverage for additional forms of cancer; and extend the claims filing period for 19 more years.

Specifically, the new bills provide those persons present in Guam for at least one year from 1946 to 1962 and were diagnosed with cancer are eligible for \$150,000 compensation and medical benefits under RECA. The cancer diagnoses eligible under RECA include:

- leukemia (excluding chronic lymphocytic leukemia)
- multiple myeloma
- lymphoma (other than Hodgkin’s disease), and primary cancers of the:
- thyroid
- male or female breast
- esophagus
- stomach
- pharynx
- small intestine
- pancreas
- bile ducts
- gallbladder
- salivary gland
- urinary bladder
- brain
- colon
- ovary
- liver (except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated), and
- lung.

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According to incidence data reported from Guam to the Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry between 2007 and 2018, seven of the top ten adult cancers on Guam are compensable under RECA.

“I want to thank Senator Crapo, Senator Luján, Representative Leger Fernández, and their co-sponsors, including Guam’s own Delegate Michael F. Q. San Nicolas for introducing their legislation in support of adding Guam as a RECA downwinder,” stated Speaker Terlaje. “This legislation is important for securing the justified compensation and benefits our island radiation survivors need. The \$150,000 for each cancer patient or survivor will help offset the exorbitant costs of treatment in Guam and improve our island’s overall access to healthcare opportunities.”

Speaker Terlaje plans to introduce a resolution this week that expresses the 36th Guam Legislature’s support of both Congressional bills to recognize and provide benefits for Guam radiation survivors.

Speaker Terlaje also wants to extend her thanks to PARS for their work in getting the new bills introduced: “For over 20 years PARS has put forth education campaigns, solicited community input to tell the stories of Guam radiation survivors, and show our island’s support for RECA. *Un dungkulu na Si Yu’us Ma’åse*’ to PARS President Robert Celestial and PARS members, past and present who helped make Guam’s inclusion in these new RECA bills possible.”

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