



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

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

## **Public Shares Personal Stories in Support of RECA Bills**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (November 4, 2021 – Hagåtña, Guam)** – Resolution No. 178-36 (LS), in support of the passage of S. 2798 and H. 5338 in Congress, received its public hearing yesterday with members of the Pacific Association of Radiation Survivors (PARS), among others lending their support through both written and oral testimony. Resolution 178-36 (LS) has received bipartisan and unanimous support from its sponsor Speaker Therese Terlaje and all other members of the 36th Guam Legislature signed on as co-sponsors.

The two measures, S. 2798 and H. 5338 were introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on September 22, 2021 and would amend the “Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA)” to include Guam as a “downwinder” of the U.S. Pacific Test Sites; increase RECA awards for downwind claimants from \$50,000 to \$150,000; provide coverage for additional forms of cancer; and extend the claims filing period for 19 more years.

PARS President, Robert Celestial, whose dedication has been pivotal in advancing federal efforts related to Guam’s inclusion in RECA, opened the public hearing with a brief history of Guam and RECA. In this history, Celestial noted how his research and collaboration with individuals like Lieutenant Bert Schreiber, retired U.S. Navy, uncovered the truth about Guam’s exposure to nuclear fallout from U.S. nuclear testing in the Enewetak Atoll between 1946-1962.

After Celestial’s testimony, many members of PARS and the public came forward to present their testimony in support of the two bills. Dozens of written testimonies from the community were also submitted prior to the hearing. These testimonies included tragic personal experiences complete with cancer diagnoses, financial hardships due to medical treatment, and families left to deal with the aftermath. Victoriana Mesa, wife of the late Jose Mesa who died from stage four multiple myeloma cancer and would be eligible for compensation under RECA if the congressional bills pass, testified about how it was common in 1950s-1960s Guam to live off the land: “To know now that all those fruits and vegetables, the local milk, and the meats that my late husband and all the people of Guam were eating and drinking back then were contaminated. And now to witness all these cancer patients’ sufferings. I hope and pray that the hearts of the Federal Government will be so touched and proceed accordingly.”

Speaker Terlaje, moved by the vulnerability of the public, shared a personal family story that resonated with many in Guam who have lost loved ones to cancer. “For years my family dealt with our older relatives’ cancer diagnoses and deaths,” said Speaker Terlaje. “I was so terrified that it would happen to me, my siblings, and my children. But when I met Dr. Chris Perez and Mr. Celestial, saw the work of PARS, and understood Guam’s history with nuclear fallout exposure, it sunk in how contamination has caused the suffering of so many in our island community. I want to thank all of you who have testified.

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Each unique perspective shared here will show Congress the real lives and experiences of people in Guam.”

To be an eligible claimant in Guam, claimants must establish physical presence in Guam between 1946 and 1962 for at least a one-year period and have a diagnosis of at least one specified compensable disease. The current list of eligible specified compensable diseases 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.

Testimony on this resolution will be compiled in a Committee Report and sent to Congress to provide further support on the two bills. If you or someone you know is interested in submitting testimony regarding Resolution 178-36 (LS) or the two bills, you may submit testimony to the Speaker’s office until November 10, 2021. You may submit your testimony in-person to the Speaker’s office located in the Guam Congress Building or via email at [senatorterlajeguam@gmail.com](mailto:senatorterlajeguam@gmail.com)