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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Dear Congressman,

While serving at Westover Air Force Base I was assigned to fly and support the C-123K transport aircraft, first used in Vietnam for spraying Agent Orange. Tests conducted by the Air Force and the General Services Administration beginning in 1993 have shown that the aircraft were still "heavily contaminated" even ten years after the last airplane was retired to surplus storage back in 1982.

The years I worked on the aircraft exposed me to deadly dioxin, according to the May 2011 study of the official Air Force test results conducted by the Department of Toxicology Oregon Health Sciences University. Federal court papers submitted by the Air Force in January 2000 described the airplanes as "extremely dangerous", "extremely hazardous", and "extremely contaminated", leaving no doubt that my duty aboard the C-123K in the presence of Agent Orange residue still on the aircraft has impacted my health tremendously.

I need your help turning to the Department of Veterans Affairs, which only recognizes Agent Orange exposure for veterans who were in Vietnam. The VA does have rules (rarely followed) for veterans like me who can prove actual exposure to Agent Orange toxins and who can also show they have Agent Orange-related illnesses, and I need your help making that point to the VA.

Please ask the VA and the Secretary of Defense to recognize the veterans of the C-123K/UC-123K flown between 1972-1982 as having served in "Agent Orange Exposure Sites". They can actually designate the aircraft as Agent Orange Exposure Sites. I would have brought this request to you earlier, but only this month did the information become known, because in 1996 an Air Force JAG attorney with the Air Force Environmental Law Office recommended that the dioxin contamination information be "kept in official channels only". Those of us veterans who've been exposed in a decade of dedicated service to our Nation are just learning about it due to FOIA results released in May. I wish they'd let us know...sixteen years was too long to wait. My family and I have paid the price.

I'm counting on you to present this to the VA to prevent any further injustice and to help me and my crewmates get essential medical care for which our military service entitles us. We willingly, and proudly, volunteered for extra-hazardous duty to fly for the Air Force, but we did not volunteer to be exposed to ten years of Agent Orange poison.

Respectfully,