



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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May 7, 2024

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, I write in support of the bipartisan Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act (S. 3853). This Act offers partial yet significant restitution to persons suffering from exposure to radiation from U.S. nuclear weapons testing, production, and waste.

As you know, on July 16, 1945, the United States detonated the first atomic bomb at the Trinity Test Site in New Mexico, followed by two offensive atomic detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki later that year. The United States subsequently conducted over one thousand atomic tests in North America and the Pacific Ocean until 1992.¹

In his letter on ecology, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis affirmed that war always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples,² and he prayed at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial for all the victims of atomic bombings and experiments. "Never again so much suffering!"³ he lamented. Following the Holy Father's visit to Hiroshima, numerous U.S. Bishops pleaded for a "world of peace and justice that is not based upon fear or the threat of nuclear annihilation but justice and human solidarity," and called upon our government to renew its primary responsibility in that effort.⁴

The suffering caused by nuclear weapons includes thousands of victims of atomic weapons testing, production and waste in the United States and its territories. After the original Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) was first signed into law in 1990, there have been approximately 36,000 approved claims. Eligible claimants include onsite participants of an atomic test, 'downwinders' (persons in areas exposed to radiation from a weapons test), and uranium miners, millers, and transporters. What RECA has accomplished for victims to date is encouraging, yet also insufficient.

Presently, only downwinders from certain counties in Nevada, Arizona and Utah are eligible to apply for RECA restitution. This means that downwinders from the Trinity Test Site cannot be

¹ Congressional Research Service, *The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA): Compensation Related to Exposure to Radiation from Atomic Weapons Testing and Uranium Mining*. Updated June 14, 2022:

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43956>

² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On the care of our common home*, no. 57. May 24, 2015:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html

³ Pope Francis, *Address at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial*. Nov. 24, 2019:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191124_messaggio-incontropace-hiroshima.html

⁴ Statement on Nuclear Disarmament by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on International Justice and Peace, February 14, 2020: <https://www.usccb.org/news/2020/statement-us-bishops-committee-international-justice-and-peace-committee-nuclear>

compensated for the illness, pain and death caused by radiation exposure,⁵ and numerous other persons in different states who have been exposed to radiation from weapons tests cannot be considered for presumptive eligibility. Those exposed to nuclear waste from the Manhattan Project stored in numerous states have also not been considered for compensation for radiation-related adverse health effects. Furthermore, the RECA cutoff date for uranium worker eligibility is 1971, but numerous uranium workers provided materials for weapons tests for almost two decades thereafter.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Reauthorization Act improves upon these serious flaws by expanding downwinder eligibility to all of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Guam, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. The Act now includes compensation eligibility for those exposed to radiation in specific regions of Missouri, Alaska, Tennessee, and Kentucky where Manhattan Project nuclear waste was stored. The Act also extends uranium worker eligibility, increases payments to all victims, and adds chronic leukemia and renal cancer as compensable diseases.

It has been almost 80 years since the Trinity bomb was detonated on U.S. soil, spreading poisonous and deadly radioactive material. As time passes, and the awareness of such damage increases, our laws must improve to reflect the justice due to those who continue to suffer the consequences. This Act extends and expands partial restitution, and we look forward to working with you in bringing relief to a long-suffering and too-often ignored group of Americans.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Borys Gudziak
Archbishop of Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

⁵ Archbishop John C. Wester, *Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament*. Jan. 11, 2022: <https://archdiosf.org/living-in-the-light-of-christs-peace>