THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America
OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMANDER
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August 1, 2023

The Honorable Maria Elvira Salazar
United States House of Representatives
2162 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Salazar:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of The American Legion, I am extending our unwavering support for H.R. 2447, The Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act of 2023. This critical legislation stands to bring long overdue assistance and recognition to countless American veterans who potentially suffered hazardous herbicide exposure during their service in the Panama Canal Zone from 1958-1999.

The Panama Canal Zone, a strategically critical territory of the United States established in 1903, accommodated both American canal workers and military personnel within its multiple forts, airbases, and naval station. It has been determined that at least 400 veterans developed health conditions synonymous with herbicide exposure, underscoring the frequent use of herbicides such as Agent Purple and Agent Orange during the period from the 1950s through the 1970s.

This legislation endeavors to assign these brave veterans a presumptive herbicide exposure status, a categorization that would unlock federal benefits and disability compensation from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and would particularly recognize their exposure to Agent Orange. The VA, erroneously claiming no herbicide usage in the region, has so far denied these essential benefits, despite mounting evidence from health issues prevalent among veterans.

Through American Legion Resolution No. 35: Agent Orange, we fully endorse the Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act, as currently written, as it signals a crucial stride towards addressing this oversight, allowing for the provision of necessary support for the thousands potentially impacted. The American Legion sincerely appreciates your leadership on this legislation and for addressing this critical issue facing our nation's service members and veterans.

For God & Country,

Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola
National Commander