

March 20, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health &  
Human Services, Education &  
Related Agencies Appropriations  
Room 131 HSOB  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health &  
Human Services, Education &  
Related Agencies Appropriations  
Room 2358 RHOB  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health &  
Human Services, Education & Related  
Agencies Appropriations  
Room 156 DSOB  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Walsh  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health &  
Human Services, Education & Related  
Agencies Appropriations  
Room 1016 LHOB  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairman Obey, Ranking Member Specter and Ranking Member Walsh:

The undersigned organizations join in urging your support for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Environmental Health Laboratory and National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (Tracking Program).

For more than 30 years, the Environmental Health Laboratory of the National Center for Environmental Health has been performing biomonitoring measurements. Through biomonitoring, we can measure with great precision actual levels of chemicals in people's bodies, determine which population groups are at high risk for exposure and adverse health effects, assess public health interventions, and monitor exposure trends over time. **We urge the Committee to provide an additional \$20 million for CDC's Environmental Health Laboratory.** Ten million would be used to enhance state public health laboratory biomonitoring capabilities, including upgrading facilities and equipment and bolstering workforce capacity. The remaining \$10 million would be used to provide technical assistance and training to states.

We also strongly support the CDC's Tracking Program. The program's objective is to track environmental hazards and the diseases they may cause. A web-based network, set to launch later this year, would coordinate and integrate local, state, and federal health agencies' collection of critical health and environmental data in order to identify populations at risk, establish the relationship between environmental hazards and disease, and guide intervention and prevention strategies.

Since 2002, Congress has provided funding for pilot programs, funding only 16 states and one city in FY 2007, down from 24 grantees. These grants have laid the foundation for the national system, as the state and local data systems will feed into the Tracking Network. By September 2006, state and local tracking grantees had completed more than 50 projects linking health and environmental data, examining asthma, cancer, birth defects, pesticide poisoning and

autoimmune and neurodegenerative diseases. In FY 2007, seventeen public health actions were completed based on information obtained from tracking.

Since inception of the Tracking Program, grantees have used tracking data to protect health. For example, the Massachusetts Tracking Program found a statistically significant association between the presence of moisture problems in a school and the prevalence of asthma, information that can inform future interventions. The New Mexico Tracking Program identified populations at risk for arsenic exposure in drinking water and provided a method to remove arsenic at the tap. A community in Wisconsin was concerned about trichloroethylene emissions from a nearby factory. Data from the Tracking Program prompted the factory's owner to voluntarily agree to change the manufacturing process to eliminate the emissions.

Tracking data informs public policy interventions and can ultimately help to reduce health care costs and potentially save lives. Health officials in *all* states need integrated health data and environmental data so that they can make sound choices that protect the public's health. With that in mind, **we urge the Committee to provide \$50 million for CDC's Environmental and Health Outcome Tracking Network** to expand it to 22 new states and support the continued development of a sustainable, nationwide Network.

It is the federal government that must provide the national leadership and resources to initiate the action required to protect Americans from environmental hazards. It is critical that we have the ability to track the relationship between environmental exposures and the incidence and distribution of disease and respectfully request that you increase funding for CDC's Environmental Health Laboratory and Tracking Program. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Trust for America's Health  
Alliance for Healthy Homes  
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association  
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
American College of Preventive Medicine  
American Lung Association  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Public Health Association  
Association of Public Health Laboratories  
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Breast Cancer Fund  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Children's Environmental Health Network  
Commonweal  
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists  
Families In Search of Truth  
Healthy Schools Network, Inc., Washington, DC  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Institute for Children's Environmental Health  
March of Dimes Foundation

National Association for Public Health Statistics and  
Information Systems  
National Association of County and City Health Officials  
National Disease Clusters Alliance  
National Environmental Health Association  
National Research Center for Women & Families  
Tulane Center for Applied Environmental Public Health  
Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine  
University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health  
U.S. PIRG