

September 24, 2007

The Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Louise Slaughter
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Stephanie Tubbs Jones
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Representatives Slaughter and Jones:

The undersigned organizations join in supporting the Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network Act of 2007. We are pleased that your bill would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish and operate a Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network and operate and maintain National Environmental Health Rapid Response Services.

Chronic diseases cause 70 percent of deaths in the U.S. and are responsible for three-quarters of health care spending. Yet, our public health system lacks the tools it needs to gather sufficient information about these diseases. The air that we breathe and the water that we drink can jeopardize our health if contaminated with chemical, biological or other hazards. It is critical that we have the ability to track the relationship between environmental exposures and the incidence and distribution of disease.

In Fiscal Year 2002, Congress provided the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with funding to develop the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program to coordinate local, state, and federal health agencies' collection of critical data. CDC selected pilot programs as testing grounds for the tracking program. Unfortunately, despite important information gleaned from the pilot programs, due to limited funding, in August 2006 CDC was able to award funding to only 16 states and one city. This important program must be expanded to all 50 states.

The Network would provide valuable information that health officials and communities could use to monitor where and when chronic diseases occur and to assess their potential links to environmental hazards. It would coordinate among existing surveillance and data collection systems. The Rapid Response Services would provide an important service by helping to develop strategies and protocols for a coordinated rapid response to higher than expected incidence of chronic conditions and potential environmental exposures.

Your bill also recognizes the value of expanding the scope and amount of biomonitoring data collected by the CDC and State laboratories. Through biomonitoring techniques, CDC can measure with great precision actual levels of chemicals in people's bodies, investigate exposures, and study the causes of diseases. Enhancing our biomonitoring capacity will help expand our knowledge of chemical exposures in people and how these chemicals affect their health.

Finally, your bill addresses another need of public health infrastructure –assuring a well-trained public health workforce—by developing centers of excellence, a scholarship program and an applied epidemiology fellowship program. Providing support and incentives to ensure the

availability of a well-trained and robust environmental and public health workforce is a critical component of establishing a well-equipped, modern public health system.

It is the federal government that must provide the national leadership and resources to initiate the action required to protect Americans from environmental hazards. The Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network Act of 2007 is a necessary step that will help provide potentially lifesaving information and also improve our public health infrastructure. We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you on this and other important public health initiatives in the future.

Sincerely,

Trust for America's Health
Action Now
Adapted Physical Activity Council
Alliance for Healthy Homes
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Breast Cancer Action
Breast Cancer Fund
California Safe Schools
Catholic Healthcare West
Center for Health, Environment and Justice
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Clean Water Action Midwest Office
Coalition for Clean Air
Commonweal
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences Institute, UMDNJ--Robert Wood Johnson Medical School
Environmental Defense
Environmental Health Network
Families Against Cancer and Toxics
Healthy Building Network
Healthy Homes Collaborative
Healthy Schools Network, Washington, DC
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Institute for Children's Environmental Health
Institute of Neurotoxicology & Neurological Disorders
March of Dimes Foundation
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
MOMS (Making Our Milk Safe)
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems

National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Health Data Organization
National Disease Clusters Alliance
National Research Center for Women & Families
Olympic Environmental Council
Oregon Environmental Council
Pesticide Action Network North America
Physicians for Social Responsibility
PTAirWatchers.org
Research Institute for Independent Living
Sciencecorps
The Maryland Pesticide Network
Tulane Center for Applied Environmental Public Health
Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
Women's Voices for the Earth