

18 November 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman, Labor-HHS-ED Subcm.
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate, SD-131
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member, Labor-HHS-ED Subcm.
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate, SD-131
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As organizations representing public and environmental health, and the children's, women's, medical, and scientific communities, we are writing in support of the new Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE). **We ask you to complete the appropriations process in order to provide the OCCHE \$6 million in FY2022** so that it can begin to fulfill its commitment to addressing the effects of climate change on the health of the American people.

The changing climate, which is occurring more rapidly than has been typical in Earth's history, is exacerbating many existing challenges to public health. Record-breaking heat waves, floods, droughts, and wildfires, increasingly severe storms, and increased distribution of and prolonged exposure to the insects that spread vector-borne diseases have caused direct and extensive harm. Emerging evidence further suggests that some of these events also have implications for the incidence and severity of chronic disease and are linked to increased mortality for people with e.g., cardiovascular and metabolic diseases. Impacts of climate change are also linked to increased psychological stress with consequent negative mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. While climate change generally affects everyone, lower-income and other marginalized populations are likely to face disproportionate effects and have less capacity to adapt to such changes, worsening pre-existing health disparities across the nation. For example, among those at highest risk from climate change are pregnant women and their babies, and the risks climb even higher when those women are from under-served and under-represented populations that may experience lower socio-economic and financial situations. **Prompt action must be taken to build resilience to climate change related health threats.**

With the largest budget of any Federal Department, HHS has a crucial role in confronting this climate emergency. One critical action the Department has taken is establishing a new Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE). This new office will take the lead in improving the Department's preparedness and response to the climate emergency by

working with other divisions of HHS to ensure climate change health issues are incorporated into their missions and programs. Most HHS divisions have limited climate expertise and don't currently have staff dedicated to climate action and climate health, so OCCHE's leadership will be needed to support proper coordination, policy development and review, and the vetting of HHS's climate action plan.

If current trends in climate change impacts continue and the opportunity to meet the current investment needs of OCCHE is passed by, we run the risk that many of the public health gains of the past century may be reversed. Without a final appropriations package for Fiscal Year 2022, including adequate funding for OCCHE, we will continue to be underprepared for the human health impacts of climate change. We ask for your leadership in ensuring that HHS's Office of Climate Change and Health Equity receives \$6 million in Fiscal Year 2022, to help address the effect of climate change on the American people.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Geophysical Union
American Nutrition Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Microbiology
American Thoracic Society
Association of Minority Health Professions Schools
Association of Population Centers
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Breast Cancer Prevention Partners
Children's Environmental Health Network
Climate for Health, ecoAmerica
Ecological Society of America
Endocrine Society
Entomological Society of America
Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research
Green and Health Homes Initiative
Health Care Without Harm
Integrative Health Policy Consortium
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors

National Environmental Health Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Population Association of America
Public Health Institute's Center for Climate Change and Health
Society for Birth Defects Research and Prevention
Society of Toxicology
Trust for America's Health
University Corporation for Atmospheric Research
WE ACT for Environmental Justice