

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 17, 2017

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

We write in strong support of funding the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at current or increased levels for Fiscal Year 2018. Americans rely on the EPA to protect public health and maintain environmental quality. Without adequate resources, the agency cannot fulfil its mission — and if it fails, millions of people will suffer poorer health and a lower quality of life. The impacts will be felt by communities across the country — and minority, low-income, and other vulnerable communities will be hit particularly hard.

The Trump administration has proposed an unprecedented 31 percent cut to the EPA's budget and a corresponding 25 percent cut to agency staff that would jeopardize Americans' health and safety. These cuts would drastically reduce or eliminate funds to ensure access to clean air and clean water; address pollution from lead; clean up toxic sites; and meet countless other urgent needs. Such short-sighted reductions would be a disaster for our entire country — and nowhere more so than in communities we represent.

Minority communities already face a disproportionate level of environmental risk due to where their members work and live. Nearly half of Latinos live in counties that are consistently in violation of standards for ground-level ozone, a key component of smog that exacerbates asthma and other respiratory illnesses. 71 percent of African-Americans live in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards. More direct exposure to air pollution results in minorities having higher death rates as well as higher numbers of emergency room visits and hospital stays due to asthma. Last year's hexavalent chromium air pollution crisis in Paramount, CA, which could repeat itself in nearby Compton, illustrates the necessity of greater air quality monitoring assistance. EPA grants currently cover about 25 percent of state and local air quality monitoring — and almost half of that money would disappear under the Trump budget, devastating state and local air quality agencies. The EPA diesel emissions grant program, which helps reduce dangerous pollution from school buses, would be cut as well.

Cuts to clean water programs would also have an enormous impact on communities across the country. 124 million Americans, including around 45 million people in the 10 states with the highest percentage minority populations, rely on headwater, rain-fed, and seasonal streams for their drinking water. States report that runoff pollution is the leading cause of water quality problems, yet the administration's budget would eliminate a program that helps states address runoff pollution from fertilizers, insecticides, grease, toxic chemicals, livestock waste, and more. EPA programs to help keep beaches safe and clean would also be eliminated under this budget.

The lead crises in Flint, Michigan and East Chicago underscore the importance of addressing lead pollution. Lead is a neurotoxin that causes developmental issues and damages children's IQs for their entire lives. Yet the Trump budget would slash funding for several programs that help to reduce the use of lead in gasoline, paint, pipes — and thus reduce lead levels in our soil. Over half a million children in the U.S. today, most of whom are poor, still have elevated levels of lead in their blood, and cuts to these programs would stall the immense progress that has been made over the past five decades to decrease lead pollution by over 90 percent.

Furthermore, the Trump budget proposes to greatly cut funding for Brownfield and Superfund Programs that help clean up and revitalize areas that have been polluted by hazardous waste, radioactive materials, and toxins. Low-income and minority populations are more likely to live near (and face the negative health and economic impacts of living near) these dangerous sites.

In addition to targeting specific programs, the administration's budget also would shut down the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice, reversing the EPA's progress in working with more diverse communities. Recent Environmental Justice grants have helped train farmworkers to protect children from pesticides, provided organizing support for communities to understand and engage in policy decisions regarding their drinking water, and helped repurpose and clean up large dump sites through collaborative efforts with local communities.

All these program cuts would be exacerbated by a nearly quarter cut to EPA enforcement efforts. In Fiscal Year 2016, the EPA successfully completed more than 300 Clean Air Act enforcement cases and took more than 100 enforcement actions to require property managers and contractors to protect vulnerable communities from the dangers of lead. Cutting enforcement will give a green light to polluters and will undercut states' efforts to clean up pollution.

We strongly believe that a well-resourced EPA is critical to protecting the health and well-being of Americans — especially low-income communities and communities of color that are already the most vulnerable. For these reasons, we urge you to support full funding for the EPA.

Sincerely,

Nanette Barragán

Nanette D. Barragán
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal

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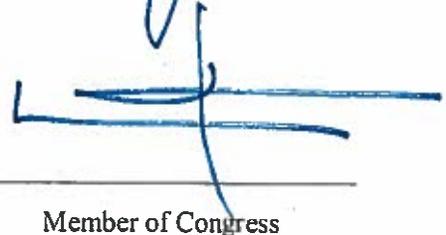
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