

October 14, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chair
Environment and Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kerry
Chair
Foreign Relations Committee
439 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chair
Finance Committee
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
Chair
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
703 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Boxer, Kerry, Baucus and Bingaman:

The undersigned environmental, science, and public health organizations support legislative action to address the critical climate challenge we face, the health impacts of which are being felt in communities across the country and the world. As the Senate moves toward consideration of climate change legislation, we urge you to retain the public health provisions that are already in the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act (S. 1733), and to strengthen them by allocating allowances to the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Fund, as in the House-passed bill.

We commend the inclusion of strong provisions that would help improve the public health response to climate change in the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act. Specifically, we are very pleased that this legislation incorporates the House-passed provisions that would require the Department of Health and Human Services to publish a national strategic action plan to assist health professionals in preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change on public health. This plan would be comprehensive and would include a variety of measures, such as enhancing disease surveillance systems; creating tools for predicting and monitoring the health effects of climate change; identifying and prioritizing vulnerable communities; developing centers of excellence for climate change and health; assisting with state, regional, tribal and local preparedness, communication and response plans; advancing climate and health research; and any other activities determined appropriate by the Secretary.

We also applaud the inclusion of a Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Fund that is not subject to further appropriation or limitation in the Senate bill. As you know, the House-passed American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (HR 2454) would allocate 0.1 percent of revenue from the emission allowances established for each year to the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Fund. **As your respective committees move towards consideration and markup of climate change legislation, we urge you to include this critical funding for the public health response to climate change.**

We are very concerned about the human health effects of climate change. Global warming is expected to worsen many health problems, including heat and other weather-related illness and injury, diarrheal and other infectious diseases. Respiratory illness associated with pollution and allergens in the air may be exacerbated. To help prepare for these challenges, we need to develop proactive global climate change preparedness strategies now. Yet, according to a national survey conducted last year by Environmental Defense Fund, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, and George Mason University, few public health agencies, which we rely on to protect us from infectious disease outbreaks and other health emergencies, have the resources to tackle this problem. In addition, an Association of State and Territorial Health Officials survey revealed that most state health officials have identified significant gaps in funding, staffing, and training to adequately deal with the challenges of climate change. We must ensure that public health agencies have the necessary resources to lead the health response to climate change and that the public is aware of the connection between climate change and health.

The effects of climate change are being felt in communities across the country and the world, and different communities and regions will continue to face distinct challenges. It is essential that our public health system is able to protect our communities from the effects of heat waves, wildfires, floods, droughts, infectious diseases, and other health impacts. By prioritizing the public health response to climate change and the protection of our most vulnerable communities, we can help avoid many preventable illnesses and deaths. Again, we thank you for your leadership and urge you to include in your legislation the House-passed funding provisions for a comprehensive public health response to climate change. We look forward to working with you in the future to protect and promote the public's health.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
American Rivers
Association of Schools of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Center for Climate Change Communication, George Mason University
Clean Water Action
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Environmental Defense Fund
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Local Boards of Health
National Environmental Health Association
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Partnership for Prevention
Pew Environment Group
Public Health Institute

Public Health Law & Policy
Society for Public Health Education
Trust for America's Health
Union of Concerned Scientists