

March 4, 2019

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
1034 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Markey and Representative Cartwright:

The undersigned public health and medical organizations thank you for your ongoing leadership to address the health impacts of climate change through your reintroduction of the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act.

Climate change threatens human health today in many ways, including from extreme heat and other weather-related illness and injury; increased spread of vector-borne infectious diseases; increases in respiratory illnesses associated with increased pollution, wildfires and allergens in the air; and drinking water contamination. The U.S. Global Change Research Program's fourth National Climate Assessment confirms that climate change is a significant threat to public health. The effects of climate change are being experienced in communities across the country and the world and different communities and regions will continue to face distinct challenges. Populations already at increased risk from death and disease – including people living in poverty, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant women and young children – are also the most susceptible to the health effects of climate change.

Yet, while there is an increased awareness of the public health impacts of climate change by the public health and medical communities, according to surveys conducted by the National Association of County and City Health Officials and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, many of the nation's health departments surveyed continue to state they lacked the expertise or resources to address climate-related health threats. In addition, many health departments still do not have a strategic plan in place to deal with local health impacts of climate change. Since 2008, local health departments have lost more than 56,000 staff and many lack resources to initiate new programs. Due in part to changes in funding or staffing resources, fewer local health departments reported addressing climate change-related issues in 2017 than in 2012. In addition, membership surveys by leading medical organizations including the American Thoracic Society and the National Medical Association have shown that physicians agree that climate change is occurring and it is impacting the health of their patients.

Your legislation would help the public health and medical communities address the challenges of climate change in several ways. First, it would require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a national strategic action plan for addressing the public health impacts of climate change. Acting through the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in coordination with other federal agencies, the bill would enhance forecasting and modeling, track environmental and disease data and expand the science base to better understand the relationship between climate change and health outcomes. Importantly, the legislation would prioritize activities to address the health impacts of climate change including preparedness planning, surveillance, education and training in order to ensure that our already overburdened state and local public health workforce can adequately address the health impacts of climate change while continuing to respond to other ongoing threats and challenges. The legislation would also provide for the development of tools to educate public health and health care professionals and the public about the health impacts of climate change.

By prioritizing the public health response to climate change, your legislation would bolster the capacity of our public health system and help to avoid many preventable illnesses and deaths. Again, we thank you for your continued leadership on this important issue and we look forward to working with you on this and other important public health initiatives to address in the future.

Sincerely,

Allergy & Asthma Network
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Lung Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Thoracic Society
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Big Cities Health Coalition
Center for Climate Change and Health
Center for Health and the Global Environment, University of Washington
Children's Environmental Health Network
Climate for Health/ecoAmerica
George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication
Health Care Without Harm
HealthHIV
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Environmental Health Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Recreation and Park Association
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Prevention Institute
Public Health Institute
Trust for America's Health