

October 23, 2007

The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
Chairman, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee  
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boxer:

Thank you for holding a hearing October 23 on the human health impacts of global warming. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) believes that climate change has serious far-reaching health implications for this and future generations. The impacts of climate change are felt first and foremost at the local level and local health departments are working to address these impacts. Many local health officials are educating the public about the health impacts of climate change in order to raise awareness about problems that are already occurring and are expected to worsen if climate change is not addressed.

Environmental changes that can be expected from climate change include: extreme temperatures, extreme weather events and natural disasters, worsened air quality, shortages of food and water, increased vector borne and zoonotic diseases, stratospheric ozone depletion and social and economic impacts on community health and well-being.

Health impacts are associated with many of these environmental changes. Temperature extremes can cause cold and heat-related illnesses and deaths, which are disproportionately felt by vulnerable populations. As seen in Hurricane Katrina in 2005, communities can be displaced and their residents suffer death, injury and illness as well as social, emotional and mental health stress as a result of natural disasters. The aftermath of this catastrophic event demonstrated that communities affected by a natural disaster can take years to rebuild after their fragile infrastructure is destroyed.

Other health impacts include increases in chronic diseases such as asthma, allergies and other respiratory illness resulting from increased air pollution. Drought can cause increased concentrations of pollutants and freshwater pathogens in drinking water supplies. Increases in vector borne and zoonotic diseases can produce changed patterns of disease like West Nile Virus with a shorter respite due to colder weather killing off mosquito populations.

Local health officials have a role to play in preparing for and combating the adverse health impacts caused by climate change. These problems will transpire differently in different regions of the country. Local health departments are engaged in monitoring the public's health, investigating infectious water-, food- and vector-borne illnesses and taking steps to reduce the incidence of disease. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the anthrax attacks following soon after, local health departments have taken on the role of public health emergency

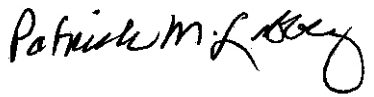


preparedness in a more focused way. Local health departments are preparing their employees and communities to respond to all hazards, including natural disasters resulting from global climate change.

In a natural disaster, local health officials work with local emergency management officials and other community leaders to make sure that public health concerns are addressed and the public's health is protected. Local health departments are currently conducting exercises and drills so that they will be prepared in any emergency, be it bioterrorism, a hurricane, flood or earthquake or an infectious disease like pandemic influenza. In an emergency, all public health personnel will be called upon, regardless of their usual day-to-day responsibilities. This means that in an emergency that lasts for an extended period of time, local public health staff may not be able to attend to their normal duties in the area of chronic or infectious disease, maternal and child health, immunizations or other public health services. This would have an immediate impact on the community as levels of immunization and other preventive services decrease and chronic and infectious disease rates rise.

In closing, local health departments are acutely aware of the health impacts of climate change and are actively preparing for these health impacts and monitoring changes in chronic and infectious disease that are expected to increase in the coming years. We thank you again for your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you to address the pressing needs of local communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick M. Libbey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "y" at the end.

Patrick M. Libbey  
Executive Director