

September 14, 2017

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 introduction of the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act.

Climate change threatens human health in many ways including extreme heat and weather-related illness and injury, increased spread of vector-borne infectious diseases, increases in respiratory illnesses associated with increased pollution and allergens in the air and drinking water contamination. The U.S. Global Change Research Program's 2014 National Climate Assessment and the subsequent 2016 Climate and Health Assessment, confirm 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, health departments have lost more than 51,000 staff and many lack resources to initiate new programs. 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 bill 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 in the future.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Lung Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Thoracic Society
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Center for Climate Change and Health
Center for Health and the Global Environment (University of Washington)
Children's Environmental Health Network
Colorado School Medicaid Consortium
George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication
HealthHIV
Healthy Teen Network
Indiana Public Health Association
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Environmental Health Association
National Recreation and Park Association
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Public Health Institute
Trust for America's Health