

Environmental Justice Health Alliance

Supporting diverse movement towards safe chemicals and clean energy that leaves no community or worker behind

December 12, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Re: The Administration's Proposed Cuts to EPA's Environmental Justice Programs, and to Support for States and Communities, Will Harm our Health and Environment

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of over thirty Environmental Justice organizations in thirteen states, and the millions of people whose health is disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards in the communities we stand with, we write today urging you to reject the Trump Administration's irresponsible and harmful proposed cuts to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018.

The proposed cuts to nearly 1/3 of the EPA's programs and grants would devastate protections for and assistance to our communities and states, which already suffer from disproportionate toxic contamination of our drinking water, homes, and even our bodies. Extensive independent research documenting higher rates of asthma, cancer, contaminated drinking water, and other impacts in our communities has proven the critical need for these programs.

Communities of color and low-income communities are already disproportionately exposed to chemical hazards and health effects linked to chemical exposures. Extensive literature documents disproportionate exposure to toxic chemicals, and to health impacts linked to chemical exposures, among people of color and low-income people. For example:

- Black (African-American) children have rates of asthma double that of White, Latino (Hispanic), and Asian children;
- Black and Latino children are much more likely to be lead poisoned than White children;
- Low-income Latino and Blacks are more highly exposed to a potentially carcinogenic chemical found in household products (including cheap toilet deodorizers);
- Latino 7-year-olds in California have more PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers), which are widely used as flame retardants in consumer products, in their bodies than almost all other people tested worldwide;
- A Massachusetts study found that communities where 15% or more of the population is non-White bear more than 20 times the environmental burden of White communities, more than 10 times as much chemical pollution released into the environment every year, and 48 hazardous

waste sites per square mile as opposed to an average of just two in White communities.¹

Nationally, the percentage of Blacks and Latinos living in fence-line zones near facilities using extremely hazardous chemicals is significantly higher than for the U.S. as a whole, and the poverty rate in these zones is significantly higher than for the U.S. as a whole.² Unequal exposures to toxic pollution reduce opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives and cause economic harm to individuals and communities.³

If adopted by the Senate, the President's FY 2018 budget proposal would:

- Reduce EPA's funding by 31%;
- Reduce grants to states by 30%;
- Eliminate 1 in 4 EPA staff positions.⁴

EPA's science functions, which are critical to sound and effective policy making, would be reduced by almost half (47%), the air and radiation program by 44.8%, hazardous waste management by 37.5%, Superfund/hazardous site cleanup by 28.1%, water pollution protection by 25%, pesticide and chemical review and regulation by 22.7%, and drinking water protection by 18%. Grants to states and tribes that support their implementation of federal environmental laws and rules would be cut by 30%, devastating these state budgets and programs. Over 50 EPA programs would be completely eliminated, including Environmental Justice programs that address the disproportionate health and environmental harms felt by our communities.

Under the Administration's original FY 2018 budget proposal, the entire Environmental Justice program would be eliminated, including the equivalent of 40 staff positions that work to address health and environmental issues in communities of color, low-income communities, and Tribal communities.

Other programs that directly benefit our communities, and especially our children, that are targeted for deep reduction or elimination include:

- Grants to states and Tribes to reduce hazardous diesel emissions in disproportionately impacted areas (80% reduction);⁵
- Reducing indoor environmental asthma triggers (the entire program, including 40 full time equivalent positions, to be eliminated);⁶
- Lead risk reduction program (the entire program, including 72 full time equivalent positions, to be eliminated);⁷
- Funds for wastewater and drinking water projects in Alaska Native villages (\$20 million in funding to be eliminated);⁸
- Cleanup and redevelopment of toxic "brownfields" sites (30% cut in categorical grants to

¹ Campaign for Healthier Solutions, *A Day Late and A Dollar Short*, February 2015, p6.

² Ibid.

³ Boyce J et al (2014). Institute for New Economic Thinking. *Three Measures of Environmental Inequality*.

⁴ Environmental Protection Network, "The Trump Budget Aims to Cripple Environmental Protection," https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/dfb365_37713d47c6f0405b9a3d64e3d264f26f.pdf.

⁵ US EPA FY 2018 Justification of Appropriation Estimates for the Committee on Appropriations, <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-05/documents/fy-2018-congressional-justification.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

implement brownfields programs, plus a 37% cut in the Agency's own brownfields budget).⁹

Just one small EPA Environmental Justice grant of \$20,000 to highly contaminated communities in Spartanburg, South Carolina jump started a community-business-government partnership that leveraged over \$250 million in other funding for environmental cleanup, job training, infrastructure, health care, and housing.¹⁰ Every \$1 spent to reduce harmful diesel emissions is matched by \$3 in non-federal funds, and produces up to \$21 in public health benefits (including a total of up to \$11 billion in monetized health benefits), including the elimination of tens of thousands of tons of toxic air pollution, especially in areas disproportionately impacted.¹¹

But the numbers don't tell the whole story. Real people and real communities benefit from these programs and the support provided by EPA staff and grants.

The Louisville, KY residents living next to a concentration of 11 highly polluting industrial plants known as Rubbertown have received critical support from EPA programs and staff slated for reduction or elimination. Community leader Eboni Cochran says:

I personally got involved when I went to a public meeting and learned for the first time that the terrible odors my family sometimes experienced and the health effects we saw in our community were probably because of the 11 or so chemical facilities commonly referred to as Rubbertown. I was determined to help reduce our exposure to chemicals. We've needed technical expertise to help us understand what we've been experiencing, and to be a science- and data-driven organization. Over the years, we have educated decision makers using our stories and data, and now they seek us out. We've gone from being seen as agitators to being valued as resource providers. We could not have made this transformation without support from many partners, including EPA staff and programs that cannot be replaced by community or state resources.

Pam Nixon of Charleston, WV wants to know how EPA will continue to protect the tens of millions of Americans who live near highly hazardous chemical facilities if the Trump budget is adopted:

I live in an area with a high number of facilities that use and store dangerous chemicals, known as "Chemical Valley." Multiple times during my 65 years of living here, I've had to shelter in place – tape up windows and huddle inside my home – when nearby plants experienced explosions or chemical leaks. Just one incident, the Freedom Industries 10,000-gallon toxic spill into the Elk River near Charleston in January 2014 contaminated drinking water for nearly 300,000 people in nine counties, and cost local businesses and the local economy \$19 million a day.¹² How could EPA possibly continue to support community and facility

⁹ "Trump Budget 2018 Released: EPA Slashed More Than Any Other Agency," May 23, 2017,

<https://brownfieldlistings.com/blog/post/trump-budget-2018-released-epa-slashed-more-than-any-other-agency>.

¹⁰ Timothy Fields Jr., "A Dream Realized: Community Driven Revitalization in Spartanburg," August 26, 2014, <https://blog.epa.gov/blog/2014/08/a-dream-realized-community-driven-revitalization-in-spartanburg/>.

¹¹ US Environmental Protection Agency, Third Report to Congress: Highlights of the Diesel Emissions Reduction Program, February 2016, at <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockkey=P100OHMK.pdf>

¹² U.S. Chemical Safety Board, "Final Investigation Report: Chemical Spill Contaminates Public Water Supply in Charleston, West Virginia," Report No. 2014-01-I-WV, September 2016, and Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research, "CBER Calculates Impact from Chemical Spill into Elk River," Feb. 4, 2014.

preparedness, including measures to prevent disasters, if it loses 1 in 4 of its employees and 31% of its total budget?

Richard Moore of Los Jardines Institute (The Gardens Institute) in Albuquerque, NM, and Sofia Martinez of the Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound and Mora County in northern New Mexico, are concerned about the possible elimination of EPA's Environmental Justice grants program that has supported communities in their state and across the country:

EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants program supported development of an Environmental and Economic Justice Strategic Plan for the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in the Mountain View community, the Southwest's first urban national wildlife refuge. The same EJ program funded the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project to educate Zuni youth about the importance of environmental stewardship and engage them in issues such as recycling, waste disposal, and solid waste reduction.

The proposed massive cuts, especially the hundreds of millions of dollars in lost support for state and local programs (which the states are in many cases required to implement by statute or regulation), fly in the face of the Administration's stated commitment to protecting our air, water, and health, and to supporting the ability of states to implement environmental and health protections.

Our communities deserve better than to see the only EPA programs that directly address the disproportionate exposures to toxic pollution and chemical disasters that we face, and many of the programs, grants, and staff that provide support for our families and communities, drastically reduced or eliminated. **We urge you and your colleagues to reject the Administration's proposed cuts to EPA's budget and programs in their entirety.**

Sincerely,

Michele Roberts
Co-Coordinator
Environmental Justice Health Alliance

Richard Moore
Co-Coordinator
Environmental Justice Health Alliance

And the member organizations of the Environmental Justice Health Alliance:

ALASKA

Alaska Community Action On Toxics
Native Village of Savoonga & ACAT/St. Lawrence Youth Group

ARKANSAS

Concerned Citizens of Crossett for Environmental Justice

CALIFORNIA

The Just Transition Alliance
Black Women for Wellness – Los Angeles
Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles
West County Toxics Coalition
People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights – San Francisco

CONNECTICUT

Connecticut Coalition for Environmental and Economic Justice

DELAWARE

Delaware Concerned Residents for Environmental Justice
Community Housing and Empowerment Connection, Inc.
Minority Workforce Development Coalition
Delaware Sierra Club

GEORGIA

Harambee House

KENTUCKY

Rubbertown Emergency Action
Kentucky Environmental Foundation

LOUISIANA

Mossville Environmental Action Now

MAINE

Learning Disabilities Association of Maine

MINNESOTA

Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy

NEW MEXICO

Los Jardines Institute
Concerned Residents of Wagon Mound and Mora County
San Jose Neighborhood Association
Eastern Navajo Dine Against Uranium Mining
Vecones de Mountain View/Sanbradares de Justicia
Place Matters

NEW YORK

WE ACT for Environmental Justice
Clean and Healthy New York

TEXAS

Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Service (t.e.j.a.s.)
Southwest Workers Union
People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources - Austin

WEST VIRGINIA

People Concerned About Chemical Safety

cc: The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman, U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman, U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Members of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Members of the U.S. Senate