

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 9, 2018

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

Environmental pollution and health hazards are risks to all people, but children's health is especially vulnerable to environmental risks. As the EPA's own website acknowledges, "Children are often more vulnerable to pollutants than adults due to differences in behavior and biology, that can lead to greater exposure and/or unique windows of susceptibility during development."^[1] Accordingly, we write to express our opposition to the Administration's plan to eliminate The National Center for Environmental Research (NCER) at the Environmental Protection Agency as part of a significant agency reorganization.

EPA's NCER houses several important research programs, including the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program, the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program and the People, Prosperity and the Planet (P3) Student Design Competition. NCER also supports a number of research fellowship programs that help foster the development of our next generation of scientists and engineers.

We are particularly concerned about the potential elimination of the STAR grant program, given the support this program provides to the Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research Centers ("Children's Centers"). Since 1998, the STAR grant program has awarded over \$300 million to 24 Children's Centers across the country, leveraging expertise from diverse disciplines to examine pressing questions on environmental hazards and children's health outcomes. The return on this investment has been enormous; the Children's Centers have produced over 2,500 publications on research that has identified the critical role environmental toxicants play in the development of asthma, obesity, ADHD, cancer, autism, and other childhood diseases and conditions. This research has led to new detection, treatment, and prevention strategies, often with a focus on the most vulnerable and underserved communities. These centers ensure that this scientific knowledge is translated into actionable information that is used by public, community organizations, healthcare professionals, decision makers, and others to protect and improve children's health.

^[1] <https://www.epa.gov/children>

Children in the U.S. are at high risk for chronic diseases, which may be a result of increasing exposure to environmental toxicants. The number of children diagnosed with leukemia has increased by 35 percent over the past 40 years; 8.4 percent of children have asthma; and 1 in 42 8-year-old boys have autism. Furthermore, while all children are exposed to environmental hazards, it is nonetheless the case that children from low-income communities and children of color experience disproportionately greater exposures.

In December 2017, the EPA's Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee sent a letter to the EPA Administrator strongly urging continued EPA support for the Children's Centers and highlighting the invaluable role of the Children's Centers network across the country. Innovations and discoveries made at the Children's Centers inform health practitioners in primary prevention programs, such as state and local health departments, about diseases and conditions affecting a growing number of American children, and also help maternal and pediatric health care providers deliver better and more effective medical care to their patients.

While it is unclear whether EPA intends to continue this research through other offices, the proposed reorganization will likely dilute and confuse NCER's critical research-oriented mission. Combining NCER's functions to foster important environmental research and knowledge-sharing with an office responsible for processing Freedom of Information Act Requests sends the wrong signal to the millions of Americans living in communities with legacy pollution problems.

As you are aware, EPA is required to submit reorganization plans to you for approval. We urge you to reject the Administration's proposal and instead provide significant funding to the National Center for Environmental Research so that it can continue to successfully carry out its important mission.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



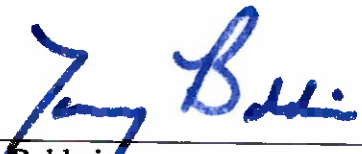
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Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator




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United States Senator



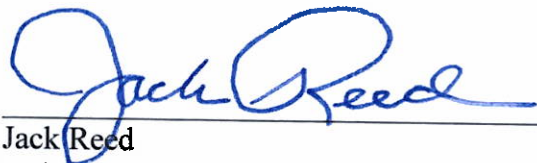
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Edward J. Markey
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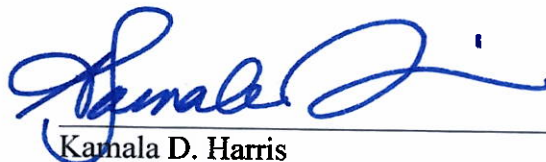
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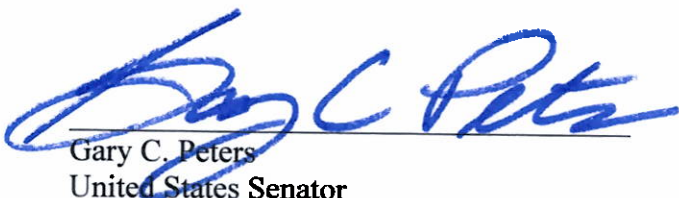
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