

March 17, 2023

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Aderholt and Baldwin and Ranking Members DeLauro and Capito:

The undersigned health organizations urge you to fund the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OOCHE) at \$5 million in the FY 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. This funding is needed to begin to fulfill OOCHE's commitment to protecting the health of the American people in the face of climate change, especially those experiencing a disproportionately high share of exposures and impacts, as well as addressing the climate impacts on the health care sector.

Climate change is both an unprecedented challenge to our health, equity, and prosperity, and an unprecedented opportunity to create healthier, more secure, and more sustainable lives for all. The urgent public health threat of climate change is increasingly clear. In recent years the nation has endured increasingly frequent and intense hurricanes, heat waves and wildfires, droughts, and flooding. Infectious diseases are expanding their ranges with increased distribution of and prolonged exposure to the insects that spread vector-borne diseases. Harmful algal blooms affect more of our coasts and inland waters, impacting people's health. The effects of climate change have also been linked to increased psychological stress and negative mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, especially for young people. Frontline communities, economically disadvantaged communities, people of color, and other marginalized communities are likely to experience disproportionately severe impacts and have less capacity to adapt to such changes, worsening existing health disparities. For example, while pregnant people and their babies are already at especially high risk of climate change impacts, pregnant people from under-served and under-represented populations face even greater risk. If current trends continue, many of the health gains of the past century will be reversed. We face a true public health emergency.

The impacts of climate change are being felt across the country having both short- and long-term effects on health care facilities and operations and public health infrastructure. Climate events can lead to suspended services, postponed procedures, facility closure and an inability to treat patients. As such, prompt action must be taken to build public health preparedness and resilience

to climate change-related health threats and health care preparedness and resilience to extreme weather events and other climate-related impacts.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has a crucial role in confronting the climate crisis. One essential action has been to establish the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity to take the lead in improving agency-wide efforts to ensure that our health care systems are undertaking efforts to mitigate climate change while simultaneously addressing climate preparedness and resilience. Specifically, OCCHE can work with other divisions of HHS, most of which lack dedicated climate staff or expertise, to ensure climate change impacts on health and health care are incorporated into their missions and programs. OCCHE's leadership is vital to ensure proper coordination, policy development and program review, and ongoing evaluation of HHS's Climate Action Plan.

As the health effects of climate change continue to grow, the importance of OCCHE's role cannot be overstated. Without an appropriate plan to address the impacts on our public health and health care system, the U.S. will continue to be underprepared. Sufficient investment will allow OCCHE to fulfill its obligation to help HHS respond to the climate health crisis. We ask for your leadership in ensuring that HHS's Office of Climate Change and Health Equity receives \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2024, to help address the effect of climate change on the American people and support our health care system in addressing climate change mitigation and resilience.

Thank you for considering our recommendation, and we look forward to working with you throughout this year's appropriations process.

Sincerely,

Health Care Without Harm
Allergy & Asthma Network
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Lung Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Thoracic Society
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Children's Environmental Health Network
Climate for Health ecoAmerica
Medical Students for a Sustainable Future
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Hispanic Medical Association
National League for Nursing
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Public Health Institute
Trust for America's Health