

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-107, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Leader Hoyer, and Leader McCarthy,

As Congress works on additional relief legislation to address the growing public health and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to ensure that the principles of justice and equity are centered in the response, and that we provide robust assistance for environmental justice communities.

The effects of COVID-19 are being felt across the country, but they are particularly acute in communities with underlying health conditions. We are concerned that environmental justice communities – low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribal and indigenous communities – across the U.S. and in the U.S. territories are especially vulnerable and live in areas that lack the necessary resources to fully recover from the pandemic. Members of environmental justice communities are more likely to be exposed to pollution that can cause other health problems, such as cancer and asthma, and too often, they also lack access to healthcare. That is why we must work together to pass legislation that addresses the needs of environmental justice communities while reducing the pollution that will make it harder for them to recover. Specifically, the stimulus must:

Provide quality water and ensure drinking water services

It is imperative that every household has access to affordable clean water, especially during this unprecedented crisis. There must be an immediate moratorium on water shutoffs and service must be restored to those who have already experienced shutoff. We must:

- Institute a national moratorium on water shutoffs for residential buildings and provide \$100 million to utilities to immediately restore all residential water services nationwide.
- Fund \$25 million to prioritize immediate potable water distribution and sanitation systems for homes without access to drinking water and/or sanitation systems to bring drinking water supplies and

sanitation systems to the urban, rural, and Tribal and indigenous communities who currently lack access to safe drinking water and adequate water and sanitation systems.

- Fund \$45 million for grants and technical assistance to replace internal household plumbing and lead service line replacement for residents whose plumbing systems have been corroded by municipal drinking water systems, such as in Flint, Michigan, and to provide home water filters for lead, PFAS, and other contaminants to help rebuild trust in municipal water systems.
- Fund \$150 million to establish three Community Water and Energy Resource Centers in Michigan to apply a decentralized approach to water treatment and water infrastructure that will resolve many ratepayer, infrastructure, and environmental issues leading to the improvement of Michigan's critically important freshwater resources.
- Fund \$30 billion for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to support investments in infrastructure and programs that are essential to providing safe and affordable drinking water to communities, protecting water systems, managing waste- and stormwater, building climate resilience, and expanding economic opportunities for low-income communities and communities of color.

Increase access to and investment in energy programs

Energy assistance and weatherization programs provide critical services to households by lowering energy bills, supporting energy efficiency improvements, and supporting clean energy jobs. These programs are already oversubscribed and as this crisis worsens, the need will expand significantly. Expansion of these programs is essential, especially for the most vulnerable households. We must:

- Fund \$3.2 billion for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program to develop, promote, implement, and manage energy efficiency and conservation projects. These programs should also prioritize communities left behind by projects to improve energy efficiency.
- Fund \$7 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP assists families with energy costs related to energy bills and weatherization and energy-related minor home repairs.
- Fund \$7 billion for the Weatherization Assistance Program to strengthen the program to better reach and serve low-income families.

Accelerate the deployment of zero emissions transportation and goods movement

Federal programs are essential to reduce harmful air pollution from transportation and goods movement. By shifting vehicles, such as transit, school buses, and trucks, as well as goods movement systems from diesel to zero emissions, we can reduce pollution and protect the health of frontline and fenceline communities. Priority for these projects must go to communities with higher cumulative impacts. We must:

- Fund \$500 million for the Federal Transit Administration's Low or No Emissions Vehicle Program to provide critical resources for transit agencies to transition their fleets to zero emissions vehicles.
- Fund \$500 million for the Diesel Emissions Reductions Act for grants and rebates to reduce harmful diesel emissions and improve air quality.

Support programs that support workforce development and pollution reduction

The stimulus is an important opportunity for an innovative and comprehensive approach to reducing legacy environmental and economic impacts on communities. It must be used intentionally to ensure that it does not impose further risks. We can create jobs while reducing pollution and its impacts on communities nationwide. In order to meet these dual goals, we must:

- Fund \$100 million for the National Institute of Environmental Health Science Environmental Career Worker Training Program to provide job and safety training for disadvantaged and underrepresented members of communities of color and low-income communities to secure jobs in environmental restoration, construction, handling hazardous materials and waste, and emergency response.
- Fund \$6 billion and increase grant size to \$500,000 for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Justice Small Grants Program to provide grants to communities to address environmental risks associated with high concentrations of pollution, to prepare for the effects of climate change, and to improve public health. Given the disproportionate exposure to high levels of pollution, climate change effects, and other impacts of historic economic and racial inequality, these grants provide critical resources to low-income communities, Tribal and indigenous communities, and communities of color to improve community health and support job creation.
- Fund \$20 billion for Superfund site cleanup to protect communities from toxic pollution. Hurricanes Harvey, Florence, and Maria laid bare the elevated public health and safety risks that Superfund sites pose to near-by communities. This spending will accelerate toxic site cleanup and protect the 53 million people living within three miles of the existing 1,836 Superfund sites.
- Fund \$2 billion for EPA's Brownfields Program to support economic redevelopment by helping states and communities safely clean up and sustainably reuse former industrial and contaminated sites. This program should be implemented through community-driven planning that protects against community displacement.
- Fund \$560 million for EPA environmental enforcement to ensure industrial facilities and other companies continue to comply with environmental regulations to avoid increasing public health and safety risks at a time when public health is already threatened by the coronavirus pandemic.
- Fund \$30.36 billion for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to provide grants to states to support community development and address economic and public health challenges created by historic racial and economic inequality. CDBG supports construction of affordable housing, programs to create economic opportunities and jobs, services for those in need, job creation, and improvement of community living conditions and quality of life.

In addition to funding these programs, stimulus legislation must include safeguards to ensure that these dollars are spent in ways that comply with environmental regulations to avoid increasing public health and safety risks. As we know, environmental regulation and spending on environmental programs does not always translate to healthy environments for all communities. As a result, stimulus spending should integrate criteria and mechanisms to prioritize the communities that are the most vulnerable, economically and environmentally. Projects must reduce locally harmful air pollution in communities coping with the cumulative impacts of multiple pollution sources and they must reduce toxic pollution in all forms. Companies with facilities located in or near environmental justice communities must significantly reduce locally harmful pollution, such as airborne particulate matter, in these communities.

As various proposals are being considered to address the impacts of COVID-19, we urge you to prioritize the needs and recovery of environmental justice communities. We stand ready to work with you, and thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress

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