

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 7, 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,

Your leadership is necessary to address the nation's ongoing crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As you consider the next legislative package to mitigate the impacts of these crises and provide critical resources for all Americans, we urge you to ensure that the principles of justice and equity are centered in this response, and that we provide robust assistance for members of environmental justice communities.

The decades-old legacy of racism and environmental inequity has made environmental justice communities – including low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribal and indigenous communities in the U.S. and U.S. territories – especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Research illustrates a clear link between higher levels of environmental risk, including exposure to air pollution,¹ and higher rates of coronavirus mortality.² As a result, members of environmental justice communities and communities of color, who are more likely to reside in areas with higher levels of pollution or live on the 'fenceline' of industry and transportation corridors, are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These same communities are also more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions caused in part by this persistent pollution – such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and asthma – which only further exacerbate the deadly effects of COVID-19.

In addition, as many Americans remain at home to reduce the spread of COVID-19, members of environmental justice communities living in low-income housing face health and safety threats within their homes. According to reports, these populations are exposed to asthma-inducing indoor air pollutants, such as smoke, mold, and

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/climate/air-pollution-coronavirus-covid.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

² <https://rhg.com/research/a-just-green-recovery/>

radon, and experience poor ventilation.³ These communities also endure inadequate access to safe drinking water⁴ and quality healthcare, which are vital resources, especially during a public health crisis. These injustices are further compounded by the economic collapse caused by this pandemic, which has further triggered high rates of unemployment and slow economic recovery within non-white communities.⁵

Given the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on environmental justice communities, it is critical that we work to pass legislation to address the needs of frontline and fenceline communities. Since the onset of the pandemic, Members of Congress have sent letters⁶⁷ urging your consideration of existing federal programs geared toward addressing the needs of environmental justice communities. Though we were pleased by the inclusion of several provisions within the House-passed Heroes Acts, including certain provisions outlined in the described letters, we reassert that any future COVID-19 relief legislation should incorporate the full measure of provisions to deliver relief to these communities. Specifically, the next package 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

³<https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/introduction-indoor-air-quality>

⁴<https://www.nrdc.org/media/2019/190924>

⁵<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/business/coronavirus-recession-equality/>

⁶<https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Grijalva%20McEachin%20Letter%20to%20House%20and%20Senate%20Leaders%20on%20Environmental%20Justice%20in%20Virus%20Response%20Marh%2026%202020.pdf>

⁷<https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04.20.20->

[Letter%20from%2016%20members%20requesting%20EJ%20priorities%20in%20next%20stimulus.pdf](https://www.duckworth.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04.20.20-Letter%20from%2016%20members%20requesting%20EJ%20priorities%20in%20next%20stimulus.pdf)

essential, especially for the most vulnerable households. It is also critical to invest in projects that can improve energy resiliency in communities impacted by extreme weather events caused by climate change, such as wildfires, hurricanes, and heat waves. 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.
- Fund \$2 billion in Department of Energy grants for clean energy microgrids and other projects that improve the energy resiliency of critical infrastructure in cities and towns across the country, with priority given to environmental justice communities.

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.
- Fund \$1 billion in grants for ports across the United States to replace high polluting drayage trucks, locomotives, and cargo handling equipment with zero emissions technology, and to develop shore power systems to reduce ship emissions.

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 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 \$840 million for EPA's Superfund Emergency Response and Removal Program. This critical program helps to protect the health and safety of communities from oil spills and releases, and risks from potential releases of toxic substances before, during, and after natural disasters and other emergencies. This program addresses a wide-range of public health and safety threats, including dangerous air quality, contaminated water and soil, and potential fire or explosion, among others. This program also creates jobs in remediation, removal, clean-up, and emergency response.
- 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 \$5 billion for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities and Flood Hazard Mitigation programs. These programs help create jobs and bolster community resilience by investing in pre-disaster mitigation, especially natural infrastructure solutions like floodplain restoration, and accelerating flood mapping.
- 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.
- Fund \$10 billion for revitalizing coal country through the cleanup and restoration of abandoned coal mines on federal, state, Tribal, and private lands through the Abandoned Mine Lands program. This program spurs long-term, locally driven economic development opportunities, and helps address the problems created by old mine sites, including polluted streams, piles of coal waste, and hazardous erosion.
- Fund \$500 million for the Urban & Community Forestry Program. Through diverse, innovative partnerships between municipalities and non-governmental organizations, this program helps create jobs in establishing, restoring, and sustaining forest cover. Improved forest cover benefits all communities by improving air quality, reducing energy burdens, and capturing greenhouse gas emissions.

Address health impacts and support programs that improve the health of environmental justice communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing racial disparities in access to care and compounded deep-seated inequities in our nation's healthcare system. The stimulus is a critical opportunity to begin to address persistent healthcare gaps, and support programs that will improve the overall quality of life for environmental justice communities. We must:

- Fund \$7.3 billion for Federally Qualified Health Centers. Funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration, these facilities provide essential, affordable, and quality primary care in underserved areas.
- Fund \$38.5 billion for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to provide mental health support and substance-use treatment during the pandemic, and to offer increased outreach. Americans are already showing signs of clinical anxiety or depression because of COVID-19, and this program will ensure communities have increased access to much-needed prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

- Establish and fund programs to protect environmental justice communities from COVID-19 hazardous and medical waste, and enable the monitoring, documentation, and reporting of medical waste disposal. Increased use of Personal Protective Equipment, including masks and gloves, has generated a huge amount of biomedical waste, endangering the health and safety of communities. We must address and properly manage the increase in medical, nursing home, and testing waste to reduce infection and environmental pollution.
- Invest in programs that address social determinants of health. Examining the social, economic, and environmental factors that drive this inequality, such as poor housing conditions, food insecurity, fewer transportation options, and lack of educational opportunities will contribute to reducing the large health disparities that exist not only from COVID-19, but other chronic conditions as well.

In addition to funding these programs, 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	Tammy Duckworth United States Senator	Raúl M. Grijalva Member of Congress	Cory A. Booker United States Senator
Pramila Jayapal Member of Congress	Nanette Diaz Barragán Member of Congress	Lisa Blunt Rochester Member of Congress	Bobby L. Rush Member of Congress
	Rashida Tlaib Member of Congress	Raul Ruiz, M.D. Member of Congress	
Richard J. Durbin United States Senator	Dianne Feinstein United States Senator	Edward J. Markey United States Senator	Jeffrey A. Merkley United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Shultz
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress