

May 15, 2009

The Honorable Lois Capps
1110 Longworth HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Capps:

The undersigned environmental, science and public health organizations would like to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act. This legislation would help improve the public health response to climate change by requiring the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a national strategic plan for addressing the impacts of climate change on public health. It would also authorize much needed funding for climate change and health research, preparedness planning, and training of the public health workforce.

As organizations representing environmental, science and public health professionals, we are very concerned about the health effects of climate change. Global warming is expected to worsen many health problems, including heat and other weather-related illness and injury, diarrheal and other infectious diseases. Respiratory illness associated with pollution and allergens in the air may be exacerbated. To help prepare for these challenges, we need to develop proactive global climate change preparedness strategies now. Yet, according to a national survey conducted last year by Environmental Defense Fund, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, and George Mason University, few public health agencies, which we rely on to protect us from infectious disease outbreaks and other health emergencies, have the resources to tackle this problem. At the State government level, a recent Association of State and Territorial Health Officials survey revealed that most State Health Officials have identified significant gaps in funding, staffing and training to adequately deal with the challenges of climate change. We must ensure that public health agencies have the necessary resources to lead the health response to climate change and that the general public is aware of the connection between climate change and health.

As Congress considers climate change legislation, it is essential that health informs the policy-making process. Your legislation recognizes the need to enhance our research on climate change and health impacts. It also prioritizes climate change preparedness planning, surveillance, education and training in order to ensure that our health system can address the health impacts of climate change.

The effects of climate change are being felt in communities across the country and the world, and different communities and regions will continue to face distinct challenges. That is why an assessment of which communities and populations will be most vulnerable to health impacts of climate change is crucial in addition to education, planning and training at the local and state level. It is essential that our public health system is up to the challenge of protecting our communities from the effects of heat waves, wildfires, floods, droughts, infectious diseases, and other health impacts. By prioritizing the public health response to climate change and recognizing the potential

for sweeping climate change policies to have both positive and negative consequences for public health, your bill would help avoid many preventable illnesses and deaths. Again, we want to commend your leadership and thank you for introducing this very important bill. We look forward to working with you on this and other important initiatives in the future.

Sincerely,

American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
American Rivers
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Center for Biosecurity
Center for Climate Change Communication, George Mason University
Environmental Defense Fund
KyotoUSA
Local Government Commission
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Environmental Health Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Pew Environment Group
Public Health Institute
Trust for America's Health
Union of Concerned Scientists