

October __, 2006

Dear Senator/Representative _____:

The undersigned organizations join in urging your support for maintaining the current level of funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program.

Chronic diseases, such as cancer, asthma, birth defects and diabetes are responsible for seven out of ten deaths in the United States. The cost of caring for people with chronic diseases accounts for more than 75 percent of the nation's \$1.7 trillion health care budget. A recent analysis estimated that in 2000 alone, almost four percent of all deaths in the United States may be attributed to exposure to toxic substances. Additionally, a report of the National Academy of Sciences estimates that 25 percent of developmental disorders in children are caused by environmental factors.

To help address this increasing burden, in Fiscal Year 2002, the CDC established the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program based upon the recommendations of a Pew Environmental Health Commission report that identified a "critical gap that exists for tracking environmental exposures and the distribution of disease and its relationship to the environment." The cornerstone of this effort is a Web-based data and information system known as the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Tracking Network). Using information from the Tracking Network, federal, state and local agencies will be better prepared to develop and evaluate effective public health actions to prevent or control chronic and acute diseases that may be linked to hazards in the environment.

Despite flat funding over the course of its first four years, the program has built the infrastructure upon which the Tracking Network will operate, identifying the necessary data systems and connecting the systems in such a way that CDC will be able to provide an accurate and much needed picture of the nation's environmental public health. With the move to an implementation phase, the program expects to make operational its Web-based environmental tracking system and roll out a report reflecting data from funded states within two years.

In Fiscal Year 2005, 21 states and three local health departments were funded for planning and capacity-building activities, infrastructure enhancement, and data linkage demonstration projects to assess the feasibility and utility of linking specific health effects data with environmental data on an ongoing basis. During Fiscal Year 2006, CDC transitioned from the planning and capacity-building phase of Tracking Network development to the implementation phase. However, because of a lack of additional funding, in August 2006 CDC was able to award funding to only 16 states and one city: California, Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York State, New York City, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. Funding will no longer be available for the City of Houston, Illinois, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, Oklahoma and Washington, DC.

In addition, the Tracking Program faces a \$4 million cut under the Senate Appropriations Committee-approved Fiscal Year 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

If Congress approves a \$4 million cut for Fiscal Year 2007, CDC would be forced to further cut state and local grantees to 12, a more than 50 percent cut in the number of participating states over the past two years. In order to respond to the pressing need to build a nationwide tracking network first identified by Congress in 2002, funding needs to increase, rather than decrease. Furthermore, preliminary results from a follow-up study to the Pew Report show that tracking funds have measurably improved our nation's ability to assess the state of environmental public health. Reducing resources would only serve to delay the expansion of this important public health initiative to its eventual goal of implementation in all 50 states.

Again, the undersigned organizations urge your support for funding the CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program at no less than the House Appropriations Committee-approved level of \$24.028 million.

Sincerely,

Trust for America's Health
Academic Partners in Environmental Public Health Tracking, Graduate School of
Public Health, University of Pittsburgh
Alliance for Healthy Homes
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA)
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Lung Association of the City of New York
American Public Health Association
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA)
Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN)
Coalition for Health Services Research
Echo Park Community Coalition (EPCC)
Environmental Defense
Families Against Cancer & Toxics
Families In Search of Truth
Greensboro (NC) Housing Coalition
Healthy Homes Collaborative
Informed Choices
Institute for Children's Environmental Health
March of Dimes
Micah's Mission - Ministry to Improve Childhood & Adolescent Health
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems
National Association of County & City Health Officials
National Association of Health Data Organizations (NAHDO)
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Disease Clusters Alliance (NDCA)
National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)
National Research Center for Women & Families
People's Community Organization for Reform and Empowerment (People's CORE)
Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR)
R.I. Lead Technicians, Inc.
Sciencecorps
The Medical Foundation

Vermont Lead Safety Project