

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment & Related Agencies  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment & Related Agencies  
125 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

We are writing to support an increase in funding for federal programs that help schools reduce exposures to indoor air contaminants through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s office of Children's Health Protection and Office of Radiation and Indoor Air.

More than twenty percent of Americans spend an average of 6.5 hours in a school each day. Studies have found that indoor environmental exposures to pollutants can be more intense than outdoor exposures, and that schools are filled with asthma triggers, which include dusts, molds, chemical fumes, pests, and other contaminants. Poor indoor environmental quality in schools leads to decreases in attendance, increases in asthma events, decreases in children's ability to concentrate, and decreases in test scores. These are all problems affecting children and their families and schools, as well as the health care system.

The EPA has more than a fifteen year history of helping schools sustain healthy indoor environments through voluntary training grants and annual symposiums. Historically, voluntary grants provided by the EPA's Office of Radiation and Indoor Air to NGOs were used to provide education and training to schools and to communities on how to identify and prevent hazards common to schools and to indoor environments, at little to no cost, given the right information and the right guidance. EPA's Office of Radiation and Indoor Air has educated thousands of school personnel, districts, and non-governmental organizations on low cost fixes and preventive steps to improve indoor environmental quality. This work helps reduce exposure to children and to personnel to dust, particulates, and hazardous chemicals, educate schools about preventing moisture and molds, and thus reduce the impacts of asthma on families and schools, and the health care system. It also helps preserve school buildings as taxpayer supported infrastructure. This prevention work is also more cost effective over the long term than health care coverage and medical care access.

Robust funding of these programs will allow the EPA to provide grants and resources to improve children's health and learning through helping k-12 schools to identify and to prevent or reduce hazards. According to data reported in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's most recent School Health Policies and Practices Study, less than half of our states are helping school districts address indoor air quality, and only 36% of school districts have a policy to purchase low-emitting products and reduce the exposure of students to indoor air contaminants.

We strongly support the Administration's request for \$8 million for the EPA Office of Children's Health Protection, which focuses on state agencies by providing comprehensive guidance

and voluntary grants. We also request \$21.1 million for funding EPA's Office of Radiation and Indoor Air. This would restore the funding to the average level appropriated from 2004 to 2009, during the Bush administration. This increase in funding will allow NGOs and communities to assist local schools to protect children's health from environmental threats in schools. This includes restoring funding to the widely recognized and praised EPA's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools program and its annual symposium which was zeroed out in 2012.

It is clear that poor environmental conditions and indoor air quality impair both students' ability to learn, and teachers' and other school personnel's ability to effectively provide learning opportunities for students. With increased pressure on our schools to boost attendance and achievement, funding for these programs is imperative.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and I look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer  
United States Senator