



Coalition *for* Healthier Schools

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Coordinated by Healthy Schools Network

February 15, 2022 -via email

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Kamala D. Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

As you prepare your funding requests for Fiscal Year 2023, we strongly encourage you to provide at least \$60 million to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help protect children from environmental risks that have been ignored for far too long, especially in view of both the climate and COVID disasters that have impacted so many K-12 school facilities.

Despite decades-long efforts by Congress to address polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), asbestos, lead in drinking water, mercury, pesticides, and other highly hazardous substances, millions of school children in the nation's 130,000 schools (98,000 public) enrolling 54M students (49M public) (NCES data) continue to be exposed to toxic chemicals and poor indoor air quality (IAQ) every day. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 40 percent of kids in schools have existing chronic health conditions that can be exacerbated by unhealthy indoor environments,¹ including an estimated 6 million American children with asthma -- the leading cause of absenteeism due to chronic illness. Unhealthy school environments are not only a public health concern, but also negatively impact thinking and learning.²

Children are especially susceptible to harm from chemical exposure and unhealthy indoor air. Yet many U.S. schools, particularly in disadvantaged communities, lack the information, tools, and resources necessary to prevent or identify prevent and effectively address environmental risks to children.

While the bipartisan infrastructure law provides funding to address energy retrofits in schools and low emission school buses, federal funds for technical assistance, training, and tools to help schools address indoor air and environmental quality problems and toxic exposures are woefully inadequate. Schools need help, as evidenced by the inability of most schools to follow CDC's guidelines for re-opening after COVID closures.³

We urge you to request \$50 million/year to fund US EPA Indoor Environments Division's proven "IAQ Tools for Schools" program. EPA's program helps schools both prevent and solve common environmental problems such as mold, cleaning and disinfectant exposure, air quality and ventilation, and other school environmental health concerns, as well as how to protect IAQ during energy retrofits. We urge an addition \$10 million in FY 2023 for EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection to advance

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/chronicconditions.htm>

² https://forhealth.org/Harvard.Schools_For_Health.Foundations_for_Student_Success.pdf

³ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/you-cant-follow-cdc-guidelines-what-schools-really-look-like-during-covid-19/2021/03>. See also: <https://www.ashrae.org/about/news/2021/ashrae-supports-usgbc-iaq-schools-survey-and-report>

research and educational outreach to families and providers via the CDC-EPA jointly designated network of pediatric environmental health units.

Finally, we strongly support funding for EPA's regional offices to help schools address PCBs present in light ballasts, ceiling tiles, and window and door caulking in thousands of facilities built or remodeled between 1950 and 1979, as well as other legacy toxics common to school facilities.

While funding to rebuild school infrastructure is desperately needed and must remain a priority for this administration, the FY 2023 budget request for EPA provides an opportunity to ensure that all schools, and especially those in environmental justice communities, and in other economically disadvantaged and rural-remote areas, are provided information, training, and tools to improve children's health and learning through addressing unjust, inequitable, and all-to-common school environmental hazards.

Thank you for considering these views.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez, MBA, President & CEO, **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**

Nsedu Obot Witherspoon, MPH, Executive Director, **Children's Environmental Health Network**

John E. Reeder, Vice President for Federal Affairs, **Environmental Working Group**

Bruce Lesley, President, **First Focus on Children**

Claire L. Barnett, MBA, Executive Director, **Healthy Schools Network**

Tracy Gregoire, Healthy Children Project Director, **Learning Disabilities Association of America**

Veronika Carella, Legislative Director, **Maryland Children's Environmental Health Coalition**

Donna Mazyck, MS, RN, Executive Director, **National Association of School Nurses**

cc: US EPA Office of the Administrator; EPA/OAR/IED; EPA/OCHP

White House Council on Environmental Quality

White House Office of Management and Budget

White House Council on Environmental Justice

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