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October 15, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and the thousands of local environmental health professionals that we represent, I want to take this opportunity to contact you on a matter of urgent concern for our membership. This letter is to indicate our strong support for the public health and prevention provisions that were included in the final mark ups in the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee's health reform bills. The provisions of this legislation calling for the development of a National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy, as well as the provisions establishing a Public Health Investment Fund are of particular interest to us.

Two key concepts that must be recognized and reflected in any legislation that emerges from Congress are commitments to strengthen the nation's public and environmental health infrastructure and to establish prevention as the central strategy in our health system. NEHA has joined many of the national public health organizations in endorsing these concepts. I am writing separately to reinforce our strong view that in the HELP committee mark-ups, the House Energy and Commerce bill, and in reconciling this legislation with the health care reform legislation coming out of the Finance Committee—the wellness and prevention provisions mentioned earlier remain intact.

Finally, let me also share our passionately held view that strong and effective environmental health programs are the backbone of an effective national prevention strategy. Effective and well-funded environmental health programs at the state and local level are essential in implementing this prevention-based strategy. These environmental health programs are uniquely able to detect, identify, and prevent environmental exposures that have adverse human health impacts in a community. It truly is prevention in its most basic form. We urge your consideration of environmental health as an essential part of an overall effective national prevention strategy that you have articulated so well. We are most appreciative of your efforts to achieve broad-based reforms in our national health care and delivery system. We are encouraged by and grateful for your recognition of the fact that a strong environmental public health system infrastructure, staffed by a well-trained workforce, is an essential cornerstone in achieving the prevention strategies that must be a part of any final health reform legislation.

Please know that you and your administration have our commitment and support as you continue the essential work of addressing our country's long overdue reform of national health policy, and in achieving better health outcomes for the American people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Welford C. Roberts", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Welford C. Roberts, REHS/RS, DAAS, Ph.D.
President, NEHA