



## National Environmental Health Association

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### Questions & Answers from the NEHA Webinar on the Environmental Health Workforce Act

- Q. I have heard some talk about getting a Climate Corp together. How much overlap would we expect between EHS and the Climate Corp roles?**
- A. The two programs are independent of each other. The [Environmental Health Workforce Act](#) requires the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop model standards and guidelines for credentialing environmental-health workers. The bill requires HHS to develop a plan for the environmental health workforce that includes performance measures and identifies (1) gaps between existing programs and future environmental health workforce needs, (2) actions needed to address any identified gaps, and (3) any additional statutory authority necessary to implement such actions. The proposed Civilian [Climate Corp Legislation](#) would establish a volunteer force similar to AmeriCorps or Peace Corps, and focus largely on climate resilience and environmental restoration to combat climate change. This bill requires the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, in coordination with other relevant federal agencies, to enter into an interagency agreement establishing a Civilian Climate Corps.
- Q. How does the Bill look in terms of other congresspeople that have signed on as co-sponsors? Does this appear to be a partisan or bi-partisan favored bill?**
- A. The bill currently has nine cosponsors. Although no Republicans have signed on at this time, some have expressed interest.
- Q. Would this loan forgiveness apply only to federal education loans? Not private loans?**
- A. Private loans would not be covered. Congress has little authority over private loans.
- Q. Would the loan forgiveness be for those working in rural areas or where EH services are lacking only?**
- A. The loan forgiveness applies to all environmental health workers, regardless of where they work in the environmental health workforce. As defined in the bill, environmental health worker “refer(s) to public health workers who investigate and assess hazardous environmental agents in various environmental settings and develop, promote, and enforce guidelines, policies, and interventions to control such hazards.”
- Q. Would this bill include the US Territories?**
- A. Yes, the bill applies to all U.S. States, Territories, and the District of Columbia.

**Q. How will you address the issue of 99% of federal loan forgiveness applications being rejected? Allowing environmental health professions to apply does not promise applications being granted.**

A. The application processes for loan forgiveness are improving. Passage of this bill would add environmental health workers and ensure that the environmental health workforce is included in public health loan forgiveness. Environmental Health is still not considered an essential service by policymakers on the federal, state, and local level.

**Q. Given the current atmosphere in Congress between Democrats and Republicans what are the chances of getting this legislation passed?**

A. All legislation in Congress faces challenges in getting passed. The introduction of HR 2661 highlights the environmental health workforce before Congress and assists all aspects of the workforce. The best way to pass it is to contact your member of Congress to express your support.

**Q. Have we been able to fold-in parts of it into the Infrastructure Bill?**

A. Unfortunately, both bills addressing infrastructure are not accepting additional provisions. Language found in the bill may be included in other legislation in the future, however.

**Q. Many officials believe the environmental health vacancy crisis is being caused by obstacles created by credentialing requirements and are pushing to eliminate them. How would this bill address this movement?**

A. This bill would nationalize the credentialing requirements, making certain that the entire workforce had the same knowledge, skills, and training. It will professionalize the workforce, subsequently encouraging more people to apply.

**Q. Will this apply to Indian tribes? If not, can it be tied into state and tribal gaming compacts requirements?**

A. The Environmental Health Workforce Act will apply to Indian Health Service (IHS) employees.

**Q. Environmental Health has a high turnover level due to the low salaries and funding. Many younger people only regard it as a pass-through job on the way to a real job, not a career. How would you change this?**

A. By professionalizing the workforce, people will have more invested in this field. It will raise the profile to be seen more as a career rather than a job. Eligibility for Public Service Loan Forgiveness will also serve as an incentive for new environmental health professionals and offset some of these challenges.

**Q. Loan forgiveness for all registered environmental health professionals regardless of if they work federally or locally would go a long way for recruitment and wage equalization at the local and tribal health levels.**

A. The law would ensure that loan forgiveness applies to apply to “public health workers who investigate and assess hazardous environmental agents in various environmental settings and develop, promote, and enforce guidelines, policies, and interventions to control such hazards.”

**Q. Environmental health professionals have been going to businesses since the beginning out the outbreak to educate businesses owners on how they can open their businesses safely for their employees and customers.**

A. This bill will reward those professionals for their dedication.

**Q. Loan forgiveness for the undergraduate professional will also help encourage someone to go on to higher education; gain more skills and improve environmental health services or even applied medicine.**

A. That is one of the goals of this legislation.

**Q. Does the bill do anything to enhance training for the environmental health workforce?**

A. While the bill does not create its own training program, it does direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to identify areas where education and training can be improved, and to communicate with relevant stakeholders as part of a larger development plan for the environmental health workforce.

**Q. How can I add myself to the support letter?**

A. You can review the [NEHA Letter of Support](#) and use the language to write and submit your own letter.