



National Environmental Health Association

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June 4, 2021

President Joe Biden
Vice President Kamala Harris
Office of the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Biden-Harris Administration to Invest \$7 Billion From American Rescue Plan to Hire and Train Public Health Workers in Response to COVID-19

President Biden and Vice President Harris,

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) represents more than 6,600 governmental, private, academic, and uniformed services sector environmental health professionals in the U.S., its territories, and internationally. NEHA is the profession's strongest advocate for excellence in the practice of environmental health as it delivers on its mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce.

NEHA applauds the White House efforts in its redistribution of [\\$7.4 billion from the American Rescue Plan](#) to hire and train public health workers in response to COVID-19, including \$4.4 billion to state and local governments to expand the staff at public health departments, the \$3.4 billion to modernize the public health workforce, and the \$400 million investment to launch the Public Health AmeriCorps.

On behalf of the second largest part of the American public health workforce, however, we request that the environmental health profession be identified by name in the \$3.4 billion American Rescue Plan to modernize the public health workforce. Environmental health professionals are critical public servants who mainly work at the local level. They mediate some of the most intimate parts of our lives—our food, water, and air. Regretfully, they are often overlooked when investments in public health are made.

As the second largest sector of the public health workforce (second only to nursing), environmental health practitioners have been essential in delivering public health services during the pandemic. Recent findings from NEHA highlight that environmental health

practitioners in state and local health departments were actively engaged in COVID-19 response and recovery ([NEHA, 2020](#)). Their efforts on COVID-19 were key in safely reopening and restoring the economy, providing emergency response operations, performing contact tracing, and communication efforts, in addition to their customary responsibilities. The environmental health workforce accepted their new roles and responsibilities even though it placed them at risk from contracting the disease. These changes came at the cost of forgoing their customary environmental health responsibilities, which suffered from a lack of attention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Administration's plan to invest \$4.4 billion in state and local governments to expand their over-stretched public health departments with additional staff must include environmental health. The hiring and training of environmental health practitioners will be necessary to ensure the safe reopening of this nation's businesses and the economy. The public health community needs a robust environmental health workforce to ensure that food is safe to eat, water safe to drink, and the environment is safe and healthful for this nation. Public health cannot operate, nor the economy reopen and thrive, without an adequately trained and certified environmental health workforce.

The plan to modernize the public health workforce by providing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with \$3.4 billion from the American Rescue Plan for the creation of a new grant program to expand, train, and modernize the public health workforce must include environmental health. Both present and future public health departments will need environmental health practitioners to perform environmental health services. Without acknowledging the second largest segment of public health workers and the services they provide means that state and local health departments will never achieve the goals sought by this effort. Environmental health is critical to ensuring a strong public health workforce both now and in the future.

Finally, NEHA supports the plan to launch the Public Health AmeriCorps along with the \$400 million in funding, with the caveat that it recognizes environmental health as part of the public health workforce. CDC recognizes environmental health through its National Center for Environmental Health and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. These two centers should be an integral part of CDC's efforts to initiate the Public Health AmeriCorps. This effort will be unable to build a new public health workforce that addresses the needs of the nation if the environmental health workforce is ignored.

NEHA strongly encourages the hiring and training of environmental health practitioners. This workforce has suffered from a decline in practitioners in state and local health departments since 2008 ([NACCHO, 2019](#)), even though environmental health services are performed in virtually every health department, from the smallest rural to the largest urban departments.

These practitioners inspect food service establishments, ensure private drinking water is safe, and perform building and housing inspections. They inspect homes for lead hazards, ensure

indoor air is clean, and that vermin are controlled. They are on the ground when a natural disaster strikes, providing their communities with safe food and water.

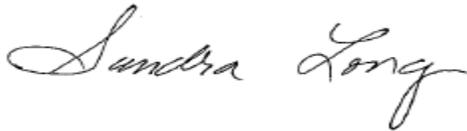
By disregarding the environmental health workforce, the Biden-Harris plan to support the development of the next generation of public health leaders will neglect a critical part of the workforce responsible for environmental public health.

As the White House seeks to work with leaders from across the public health community, NEHA recommends that this includes leaders from the environmental public health community. Being part of this effort will acknowledge the value provided by the environmental health workforce, while ensuring that this effort achieves the maximum success for the state and local public health workforce, as well as your Administration.

NEHA supports this effort and wants to see it succeed yet has doubts to its success if the second largest sector of the public health workforce is not included.

NEHA looks forward to working with the Administration on this effort.

Sincerely yours,



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cc:

Senator Patty Murray, WA, Chair
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Senate Subcommittee on Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies

Senator Richard Burr, NC, Minority Chair
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Senator Roy Blunt, MO, Minority Chair
Senate Subcommittee on Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, CT, Chair
House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Congressman Tom Cole, OK, Ranking Minority Member
House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence, MI, Vice Chair
House Committee on Appropriations