



March 20, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler,
Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Submitted through Regulations.gov

Attention: Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OA-2018-0259

Re: 60-day comment deadline extension and public hearings request– Strengthening
Transparency in Regulatory Science

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

The undersigned health and medical organizations request at minimum a 60-day extension of the deadline to comment on the Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science Supplemental Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (SNPR) that appeared in the Federal Register on March 18, 2020 with a comment deadline of April 17, 2020. The SNPR notice is a significant expansion and revision to the original notice of proposed rulemaking that requires careful analysis and review. Further, the proposed rule will have far reaching implications on public health and environmental protection and the science that informs these decisions, so we request that EPA hold a minimum three public hearings to receive input from the public. Because of the nationwide implications of the rule, we recommend that the hearings be held in Washington, DC; Chicago, IL and San Francisco, CA.

As you are well aware, on March 13, 2020, President Donald Trump declared a National Emergency due to COVID-19. Since that declaration, the President has recommended that gatherings be limited to ten people. San Francisco has ordered the public to shelter in place. Health officials in communities across the nation are recommending teleworking, social distancing and more to reduce the spread. So, it would not be appropriate to convene in-person public hearings while the nation works to address COVID-19. We therefore recommend that the hearings be postponed, followed by the requisite 30 days to comment post-hearing, until public health officials determine that is safe and appropriate for large gatherings to resume. In the alternative, due to the extraordinary circumstances, EPA could convene three days of telephonic public hearings for EPA to receive public comments. EPA's Scientific Advisory Board and Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee routinely invite public comments via teleconference, so it is clear that the agency has experience to manage this approach.

The SNPR notice is significantly different from the original proposal, including two new alternative pathways for the rulemaking, an expansion of the scientific information covered, and an expansion of the EPA processes included. These changes require careful analysis and review, and a 30-day comment period is not sufficient.

The comment period extension is also needed to allow health professionals and medical researchers the opportunity to provide comments on the SNPR. Pulmonary and critical care physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists and others are on the frontline of COVID-19 response. Many researchers who study lung disease and are very interested in the proposed rule are focused on testing and treating patients to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. Extending the comment period by a minimum of 60 days may move this deadline to a time when these experts will have the opportunity to prepare meaningful comments.

Our organizations strongly support the use of the best science to inform policy. The COVID-19 National Emergency poses unique and unprecedented challenges to our nation and the world. We believe that an extension of a minimum of 60 days will provide us and other stakeholders greater opportunity for full and meaningful public participation. However, because we do not know what the situation with COVID-19 will be in May and June, we reserve our prerogative to request an additional extension.

Thank you for considering this request for at least three public hearings and a minimum of a 60-day extension of the deadline until June 15, 2020.

We wish you and all of your colleagues good health during this time of National Emergency.

Sincerely,

Allergy & Asthma Network
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
American Public Health Association
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Children's Environmental Health Network
Climate for Health
Endocrine Society
Health Care Without Harm
Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Environmental Health Association
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Trust for America's Health

cc. Jennifer Orme-Zavaleta, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator for Science; EPA
Science Advisor
David Dunlap, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Science Policy
Cheryl A. Hawkins, Office of Science Advisor, Policy and Engagement