

December 19, 2008

Dear President-Elect Obama:

We are representatives of a wide range of women's health and justice organizations. We are deeply concerned about the lack of attention given to increasing rates of disease experienced by women and girls that may be attributed to toxic chemicals in consumer products, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. We are optimistic that your new administration will place a high priority on addressing these issues.

This letter is an invitation for further dialogue about how we can support your leadership in better protecting our health. Some of our top concerns and proposals for action include:

1. Inadequate regulation of chemicals: The United States does not have adequate policies that prevent harmful chemicals from being introduced into our environment and our bodies. Diseases and serious health problems such as cancer, asthma, infertility, learning disabilities and earlier puberty in girls can be linked in part to inadequately regulated use of chemicals. *Proposed Actions:*

Reform the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). With its passage in 1976, TSCA declared "safe" some 62,000 chemicals already in use, with little or no data to support such a declaration. Since enactment, about another 20,000 chemicals have entered the stream of commerce with little or no data to support their safety. The Kid Safe Chemical Act, introduced in 2007, would require that all chemicals be proven safe for children before they can be sold and would require greater transparency on the hazards and uses of chemicals.

Support laws that ensure cosmetics are safe. Major loopholes in federal law allow the \$50 billion cosmetics industry to put unlimited amounts of chemicals into personal care products with no required testing, no required monitoring of health effects, and inadequate labeling requirements. Neither cosmetic products nor cosmetic ingredients are reviewed or approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before they are sold to the public. In fact, the FDA cannot require companies to do safety testing of their cosmetic products before marketing. We need laws that require pre-market safety testing of all cosmetic ingredients and prohibit the use of ingredients linked to cancer, birth defects, infertility and genetic mutation in cosmetics and personal care products. We also need to ensure the FDA Office of Cosmetics and Colors has adequate funding to provide effective oversight of the cosmetics industry.

2. Racial and Socioeconomic Disparities: People of color, recent immigrants and low-income people are more likely to experience the greatest impact from harmful chemical exposures due to a range of factors, including: being more likely to live and work near contaminated sites (for example, agricultural fields, landfills and industrial sites), often with fewer options to change their living or work situations, higher-risk products being marketed to people of color, inadequate health care coverage and/or lack of culturally competent health care access and a wide range of other systemic racial and economic biases. These problems are especially likely to affect women of color who are disproportionately pushed into poverty and who often carry a disproportionate burden of supporting their families. *Proposed Action:*

Support policies that acknowledge and reduce socioeconomic and racial disparities. These disparities run deep in the U.S. and are embedded in many of the institutions and systems of our government and culture. Proposed legislation such as the Environmental Justice Act, which would codify the principles of environmental justice, and the Healthy Communities Act, which would ensure that the government has the authority to promote healthier living in community planning, should be supported. We thank you for introducing the Healthy Communities Act.

3. Inadequate Health Care Coverage: All people deserve affordable and culturally competent health care. Special attention must be paid to the needs of pregnant women, young children and the elderly. *Proposed Actions:*

Implement national health care reform that ensures adequate and culturally competent coverage for all. We thank you for raising this important issue during your campaign, and look forward to your implementing changes so that all people have access to quality health care.

Restore Medicaid and Medicare funding to levels that allow recipients to receive proper care. Cutbacks in Medicaid funding and physician reimbursement under Medicare have created a cash crunch, which has led to the closure of many not-for-profit health centers. We must correct the system so Medicaid and Medicare cover outpatient services, such as visiting nurses or other home visiting programs, and so there is financial support for transportation that will allow adequate care delivery in rural areas and Native American lands.

4. Lack of Health Tracking and Biomonitoring Infrastructure: This nation lacks coordinated systems for tracking disease in the population as well as for tracking human exposure to environmental contaminants. We need this information so that the government can make informed investments in public health. *Proposed Action:*

Expand and modernize our health and environmental tracking infrastructure. The federal agencies that help us understand and prevent environmental contributors to disease – including the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, the Environmental Protection Agency and the biomonitoring efforts of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – must be expanded and modernized.

5. Lack of Health Research on the Most Vulnerable: There is also a systemic lack of funding for research on the impacts of chemicals on human health, especially the health of the most vulnerable, such as the fetus and children and, by extension, women of child bearing age. Greater emphasis must be placed on supporting research on women's health and children's health.

Proposed Actions:

Invest in expanding and improving nonhuman testing for potentially harmful chemicals. The ability of chemicals to harm health needs to be tested before humans are exposed, and should be done through expanding existing testing systems and investing in research to develop new assays to rapidly screen environmental chemicals. While animal testing currently provides the best method for predicting harm in humans, future efforts should identify cellular and other systems that can eventually replace animal testing to enhance animal welfare. Testing should include an emphasis on effects of early-life exposures on immediate and adult outcomes, effects of exposure to multiple contaminants and expanded endpoints (particularly female reproductive endpoints) of concern.

Fund the National Children's Health Study. The Children's Health Act of 2000 authorized the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and other agencies to follow 100,000 children from birth to age 21 to measure environmental influences on their health and development. The study seeks to address six chronic illnesses (obesity, injury, asthma, diabetes, schizophrenia and autism) which cost Americans \$642 billion each year. If the study resulted in a 1% reduction in the cost of these diseases, it would save Americans \$6.4 billion a year, paying for itself twice over in only one year. However, despite all the work that has gone into the design of the study, President Bush recommended zero funding for fiscal year 2009. For the study to move forward, your administration will need to restore funding and continue to fund the program at a suitable level.

Authorize the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) "Study of Studies." Increasing evidence links environmental toxins and human infertility and birth defects, but the federal government is not collecting data on this subject in a systematic manner. The president's budget for fiscal year 2010 should authorize the National Institute of Environmental and Health Sciences to direct NAS to conduct a review of existing and

forthcoming research and issue a report on the links between chemical contaminants and reproductive health.

Support Environmental Research and Clinician Training. Renew and expand support for the National Toxicology Program, the National Institute of Environmental Health Studies, and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health to study the biology of pregnancy, fetal development and reproductive health, the complexities of racial and social disparities and the impact of the environment on human health. Community-based research is essential for an improved understanding of disproportionate impacts on highly exposed communities and vulnerable populations. Clinician training should be funded to add environmental health issues to the provision of health care.

6. Eroded public health infrastructure: We need to rebuild the capacity to respond to natural disasters and climate-related events. Hurricane Katrina is an excellent example of the potential to overwhelm local authorities' ability to respond to a crisis. *Proposed Action:*

Invest in infrastructure that prevents public health catastrophes. Dedicate federal funding to ensure that there is adequate local capacity to respond to climate-related events or other natural disasters. Support funding for states and localities to repair bridges and invest in water infrastructure to address aging systems that need to isolate sewer and wastewater and create increased capacity to filter microorganisms and toxics like pharmaceutical residues.

We trust that you and your administration share our concerns for protecting human health and preventing escalating rates of breast cancer, infertility, birth defects and other serious women's health concerns. This letter is an invitation for dialogue on these important issues and a request to brief your staff on these important issues. We look forward to four years of working together to advance these and other women's environmental health and justice and reproductive health and justice priorities.

Sincerely,

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