



**Children's
Environmental
Health
Network**

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**Testimony for the Record by Nsedu O. Witherspoon, MPH
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for the Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States House Committee on Appropriations**

We at the Network thank Chairman Kingston and Ranking Member DeLauro for this opportunity and for your ongoing concern about environmental risks to children. Our statement focuses on key programs and activities that safeguard the health and the future of all of our children:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (\$7.8 billion), especially the National Center for Environmental Health (\$143.7 million) and its programs:
 - Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
 - National Asthma Control Program
 - National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program
 - Environmental Health Laboratory
 - Healthy Community Design Initiative (HCDI).
- the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) (\$717.7 million), especially Children's Environmental Health Research Centers of Excellence
- Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs) (\$1.8 million)

The Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN) is a national organization created to protect the developing child from environmental health hazards and promote a healthy environment.

Investments in programs that protect and promote children's health will be repaid by healthier children with brighter futures. (For example, removing lead in gasoline has saved the U.S. an estimated \$200 billion each year since 1980 in the form of higher IQs for that year's newborns).

Protecting our children -- those born as well as those yet to be born -- from environmental hazards is truly a national security issue.

Our nation's future will depend upon its future leaders. When we protect children from harmful chemicals in their environment, we help to assure that they will reach their full potential. We have a responsibility to our nation's children, and to the nation that they will someday lead, to provide them with a healthy environment. Additionally, American competitiveness depends on having healthy educated children who grow up to be healthy productive adults. Yet, growing numbers of our children are diagnosed with chronic and developmental illnesses and disabilities such as obesity, asthma, learning disabilities, and autism. A child's environment plays a role in these chronic conditions and contributes to the distressing possibility that today's children may be the first generation to see a shorter life expectancy than their parents due to poor health. Thus it is vital that the Federal programs and activities that protect children from environmental hazards receive adequate resources.

We strongly urge the Committee to take a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not include further cuts to children's environmental health programs. Key programs in your jurisdiction, which CEHN urges you to support, include:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

As the nation's leader in public health promotion and disease prevention, the CDC should receive top priority in federal funding. CDC continues to be faced with unprecedented challenges and responsibilities. CEHN applauds your support for CDC in past years and urges you to support a funding level of \$7.8 billion for CDC's core programs in FY 2014.

The **National Centers for Environmental Health (NCEH)** is particularly important to protecting the environmental health of young children. NCEH's programs are key national assets. Yet, since fiscal year 2009, NCEH funding has been cut approximately 25 percent while, as mentioned above, environment plays a role in the cause, prevention, or mitigation of today's pediatric epidemics of obesity, asthma, learning disabilities, and autism.

We continue to be concerned about the elimination of **Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program** funding for state and local programs in FY 2012. The loss of vigilant surveillance, primary prevention activities, and case management has jeopardized the health of children living in homes where exposure to lead, asthma and other illnesses related to rodent and insect infestation, chemical exposures, and other risk factors is likely. We must sustain reducing lead poisoning by supporting effective local and state efforts.

NCEH's **National Asthma Control Program** funds 36 states and territories to conduct asthma surveillance, educate asthma patients, families, and health care providers, and help health departments eliminate potential asthma triggers. Now is the time to maintain our commitment to asthma control, not cut funding.

The CDC's **National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program** helps to track environmental hazards and the diseases they may cause and to coordinate and integrate local, state and Federal health agencies' collection of critical health and environmental data. Public health officials need integrated health and environmental data so that they can protect the

public's health. This network currently operates in 23 states and New York City to help public health officials and key policymakers make better policy decisions to improve population health. Participation in the tracking network development will decline further under any further cuts and erase the progress we have made across the country to better link data with public health action.

CEHN also strongly supports CDC's **Environmental Health Laboratory** and the **Healthy Community Design Initiative** (HCDI). The HCDI provides essential expert assistance and consultation across HHS and national leadership on the impacts of the built environment on health including physical activity levels.

National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS)

NIEHS is the leading institute conducting research to understand how the environment influences the development and progression of human disease. NIEHS plays a vital role in our efforts to understand how to protect children, whether it is identifying and understanding the impact of substances that are endocrine disruptors or understanding childhood exposures that may not affect health until decades later. CEHN recommends that \$717.7 million be provided for NIEHS' FY 2014 budget.

Children's Environmental Health Research Centers of Excellence

The Children's Environmental Health Research Centers, jointly funded by the NIEHS and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), play a key role in providing the scientific basis for protecting children from environmental hazards. With their modest budgets, which have been unchanged for more than 10 years, these centers generate valuable research. The scientific output of these centers has been outstanding.

Several Centers have established longitudinal cohorts, which have resulted in valuable research results. The Network is concerned that as a Center's multi-year grant ends and the Center is

shuttered, these cohorts and the invaluable information they can provide are being lost. The Network urges the Subcommittee to assure that NIEHS has the funding and the direction to support Centers in continuing these cohorts. The work of these Centers has also shown us that, in addition to research regarding a specific pollutant or health outcome, research is desperately needed in understanding the totality of the child's environment -- for example, all of the exposures the child experiences in the home, school, and child care environment -- and how to evaluate those multiple factors. CEHN urges you to support these Centers to assure they receive full funding and are extended and expanded as described above.

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units

Funded jointly by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the EPA, the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs) form a valuable resource network, with a center in each of the U.S. Federal regions. PEHSU professionals provide medical consultation to health care professionals on a wide range of environmental health issues, from individual cases of exposure to advice regarding large-scale community issues. PEHSUs also provide information and resources to school, child care, health and medical, and community groups to help increase the public's understanding of children's environmental health, and help inform policymakers by providing data and background on local or regional environmental health issues and implications for specific populations or areas. We urge the Subcommittee to fully fund ATSDR's portion of this program in FY 2014.

In conclusion, healthier children with brighter futures will repay investments in programs that protect and promote children's health, an outcome we can all support. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.