

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

February 4, 2020

The Honorable Kathy Castor
H2-359 Ford House Office Building
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Garret Graves
2402 Rayburn House Office Building
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Castor and Ranking Member Graves:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), representing the nearly 3,000 local health departments across the country, I write to thank you for highlighting the impact of climate change on our nation's health through the hearing, "Creating a Climate Resilient America: Overcoming the Health Risks of the Climate Crisis." Climate change has serious and far-reaching health implications for present and future generations. We appreciate your focus on this incredibly important issue.

Across the country, local health departments are tasked with addressing the many health risks that stem from climate change. As the climate continues to change communities will be susceptible to a number of health threats, including increased exposure to and geographic reach of vector-borne and infectious diseases like Zika and Lyme disease, exacerbation of respiratory conditions and allergies due to worsening air quality and pollution levels, food shortages, and lack of access to safe drinking water. Similarly, the increasing frequency and intensity of adverse weather events, like floods and wildfires, or natural disasters like hurricanes pose unique public health threats to the communities affected.

With the necessary resources, local health departments are uniquely positioned to prepare for and respond to these health impacts and protect the public's health. For example, NACCHO, with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, offered a funding opportunity to supplement local health departments' ongoing climate change and health adaptation initiatives. In January 2019, NACCHO awarded the Boston Public Health Commission and the Marquette County Health Department (MI) each with \$15,000 grants to use in climate and health projects through July 31, 2019. In Boston, the grant supports the translation and printing of extreme temperature resource guides to reach all intended populations, particularly non-English speakers who may be the most vulnerable, while Marquette County is developing a public health emergency response plan specifically addressing climate change-related localized flooding, which is predicted to increase in this rural locality.

However, many more communities need this type of support to effectively plan and act to address the public health effects of climate change. Unfortunately, while NACCHO surveys have consistently found that local health officials are concerned about climate change, few feel that they have the tools to address it in a comprehensive way. Nearly eight out of ten local health department directors believe their local health department lacks the expertise to assess the potential impacts of climate change and



effectively create adaptation plans to respond to climate change. While more than half of health department directors acknowledge the health impacts of climate change, less than 20% (one-fifth) have the resources and expertise needed to assess the potential impacts, create effective plans, and protect their community from these health impacts. A strong public health workforce is critical to be able to respond to the changing climate and best protect communities across the country from its effects.

NACCHO strongly urges all levels of government to collaborate with community stakeholders in preparation for and response to a changing global and local climate. Local health departments and the public health community can and should provide strong leadership in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Thank you, again, for holding this important hearing. Please contact Eli Briggs, NACCHO Senior Director of Government Affairs at ebriggs@naccho.org or 202-507-4194 if you require additional information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Tremmel Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA
CEO