

# DELAWARE CONCERNED RESIDENTS

## FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

December 12, 2017

The Honorable Senator Tom Carper  
513 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Senator Christopher Coons  
127A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

### **Re: Proposed Cuts to EPA's Staff and Programs Would Harm Wilmington's and Delaware's Health and Safety, and Decimate Local and State Budgets**

Dear Senator Carper and Senator Coons:

On behalf of our members in Wilmington and throughout Delaware, we write today urging your action to protect funding and programs administered by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that are vital to our individual health and the health of our community. Your support is urgently needed to oppose the Trump Administration's proposed cuts to a wide variety of programs and grants that protect Delaware children and families, especially those already disproportionately exposed to toxic hazards.

Delaware Concerned Residents for Environmental Justice (DCR4EJ) is a community-based organization that works to inform and empower communities to take action to protect the fundamental right to clean air, water, land and food.

Wilmington and the surrounding area is a vibrant community, but it is also a community dealing with a legacy of environmental injustice, hazardous facilities that pose a constant risk of chemical disasters, ongoing toxic releases, contaminated industrial sites, and substantial economic development problems. The Wilmington area's concentration of heavy industrial facilities that store, use, and release many highly hazardous chemicals, and contaminated industrial sites, has created great environmental and health contamination, as well as ongoing toxic releases and chemical disasters, that require intensive investment and effort to address – far more than our city and state can do on their own.

The Wilmington community of Southbridge has, within its boundaries or within a one-mile radius around it, two high-risk chemical facilities, 13 large pollution-emitting industrial facilities, four Superfund sites, and 48 Brownfield sites. Southbridge is home to more than half of all brownfields in Delaware.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, Environmental Justice Health Alliance, Delaware Concerned Residents for Environmental Justice, Community Housing and Empowerment Connections Inc., and Coming Clean, *Environmental Justice for Delaware: Mitigating Toxic Pollution in New Castle County Communities*, October 2017, available at <http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2017/10/ej-for-de-report-ucs-2017.pdf>.

A new report released on October 19 found that seven largely Black or Hispanic communities in south Wilmington and New Castle County, some with poverty rates twice that of the state as a whole, “face a substantial potential cumulative health risk from (1) exposure to toxic air pollution, (2) their proximity to polluting industrial facilities and hazardous chemical facilities, and (3) proximity to contaminated waste sites.” The report also noted that “these health risks are substantially greater than those of residents of a wealthier and predominantly White Delaware community and for Delaware as a whole.”<sup>2</sup>

Community organizations, businesses, and local and state governments cannot make progress in addressing these challenges without the critical support, expertise, and funding provided by EPA staff, programs, and grants (both special funds or grants and the “categorical” grants that support state development and implementation of air, water, and other health and environmental programs). In particular, EPA’s Environmental Justice program and grants are critical to the ability of disproportionately impacted communities like Southbridge and many others in Delaware to understand and address the multiple toxic and environmental hazards they face.

Numerous studies, including the recent Delaware report noted above, have found that people of color and those living in poverty are exposed to higher levels of environmental pollution than Whites or people not living in poverty. Studies have also found that, compared to national averages, a significantly greater percentage of Blacks (African Americans), Latinos (Hispanics), and people at or near poverty levels tend to live near industrial facilities that use large quantities of toxic chemicals and present a risk of major chemical disasters with potentially severe consequences for nearby communities

Despite these facts, the Trump Administration has proposed to slash EPA’s Environmental Justice program, eliminating the equivalent of 40 staff positions that work to address health and environmental issues in communities of color, low-income communities, and Tribal communities, and even entirely eliminate the Office of Environmental Justice. And the Administration’s FY 2018 budget proposal would cut EPA’s overall budget by almost 1/3 and grants to states by 30%, devastating state budgets and protections for our air, water, and health. If the Administration’s EPA budget cuts are adopted, Delaware could lose millions in funding, including \$1 million in funding to reduce pollution runoff, \$164,400 for drinking water protection, and \$391,800 in water pollution control funds.<sup>3</sup> These irresponsible budget cuts would put Delaware resident’s health and safety at risk, and critical programs, staff, support, and expertise would be lost at the national, state, and local levels if these cuts are adopted.

Ongoing toxic emissions and chemical disasters aren’t the only reasons that Wilmington and Delaware need a robust and fully-funded EPA. EPA’s program to clean up the 22 Superfund and 127 Brownfield sites in Delaware has benefited the entire state.<sup>4</sup> However, the Trump administration is threatening to slash these unique cleanup programs, cutting Superfund by a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Eichmann, Delaware’s top environmental official joins group decrying Trump EPA cuts, Newsworks, August 31, 2017, at <http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/delaware/106850-delawares-top-environmental-official-joins-group-decrying-trump-epa-cuts-video>.

<sup>4</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency, Cleanups in My Community, at <https://www.epa.gov/cleanups/cleanups-my-community>.

third and the Brownfields program by 20%. This is extremely detrimental and irresponsible to the communities that are already plagued with a multitude of environmental challenges, and need these programs to sustain and protect their citizens and redevelop their economies.

The Brownfields program helped transform a former scrap metal business, auto salvage yard, and industrial landfill that was contaminated with volatile organic compounds and arsenic in the soil as well as aluminum, arsenic, iron, lead, and manganese in the ground water, into the business headquarters of the Buccini/Pollin Group. EPA's investment leveraged \$150,000 for cleanup activities and 100 jobs associated with redevelopment, returning 8 acres of contaminated property back to productive use.<sup>5</sup> This is only one of many toxic sites now remediated and redeveloped as a direct result of this critical EPA program.<sup>6</sup>

Other EPA grant programs provide critical benefits to our health and welfare. For example, EPA's Urban Waters Small Grants program funded work to develop a green infrastructure plan to address chronic flooding in the Southbridge community. This has been a long process that is not complete and needs continued attention.

"Each time there is a rain event in Southbridge it floods," said Ken Dryden, member of DCR4EJ and former longtime resident of Southbridge. "Community members are given flood kits. They have been told for many years that the City will fix the flooding issue. There is a very high unemployment rate and high rates of many illnesses and deaths." The recent push to amend Delaware's Coastal Zone Act will allow for more dredging of the neighboring Port of Wilmington, and does not include a science-based stakeholder process.

We strongly oppose proposals by the Trump Administration and EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to abandon much of the EPA's role in protecting public health and the environment, which we depend on for a healthy economy and communities, and shift these responsibilities to already underfunded and overburdened state budgets. Not only can most states not possibly absorb these costs and duties, a national approach to key issues – including environmental justice – makes sense, and the opportunities and benefits of these programs should be available to all Americans, not just those who live in the wealthiest states. In fact, EPA's current Environmental Justice Strategy (EJ 2020) specifically recognizes "the need for a more systematic approach to reducing environmental and health disparities for minority, low-income and tribal populations and improve the air, water and land in the nation's most overburdened communities" and includes national goals and activities.<sup>7</sup>

Wilmington and Delaware could not possibly take on these costs and programs, and their reduction or elimination would directly harm the health, environment, and economy of our city and state. Any attempt to recreate federal programs from scratch on a state-by-state and city-by-city basis would be costly and inefficient, and would never be attempted in most places, resulting

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<sup>5</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency, A Former Brownfield is Now Home to a Successful Brownfields Developer, at [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/wilmington\\_de\\_brag.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/wilmington_de_brag.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/brownfields-success-stories>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EJ 2020 Action Agenda: EPA's Environmental Justice Strategy at <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/ej-2020-action-agenda-epas-environmental-justice-strategy>, and National EJ Challenges at <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/ej-2020-national-ej-challenges#existing>.

in the loss of important and cost-effective health, environmental, and economic benefits.

We urge to you reject all of the Administration's proposed cuts to EPA's FY 2018 budget, and ask you to support robust continued funding for these critical health and environmental programs, including the Environmental Justice program, the Risk Management Plan program and other programs to prevent and address chemical disasters, the Brownfields program, and grants to cities, states, and communities for both special projects and ongoing "categorical" grants to develop and implement environmental programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and for your action in support of the important programs EPA administers for the health and economic prosperity of your constituents.

Sincerely,

Paulyne Webster  
Co-Founder  
Delaware Concerned Residents for Environmental Justice  
719 N. Shipley Street, Wilmington, DE 19801

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman, U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman, U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee  
Members of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee  
Members of the U.S. Senate