



Children's
Environmental
Health
Network

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**Testimony presented by Cynthia Bearer, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP
on behalf of the Children's Environmental Health Network
before the Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, Education & Related
Agencies, United States House Committee on Appropriations**

On behalf of the Network, I thank you, Chairman Kingston and Ranking Member DeLauro, for this opportunity to testify and for your ongoing concern about environmental health risks to children. My testimony and the statement I am submitting for the record focus on key programs and activities that safeguard the health and future of all of our children:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (\$7.8 billion), especially the National Center for Environmental Health (\$181.1 million) and its programs, including:
 - Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (\$29 million)
 - National Asthma Control Program (\$28 million)
 - National Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (\$40 million)
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) (\$717.7 million), especially the Children's Environmental Health Research Centers (\$33 million)
- Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs) (\$2 million)

The Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN) was created more than 20 years ago by concerned pediatricians and researchers with a goal of protecting the developing child from environmental health hazards and to promote a healthy environment.

Today's children are facing the distressing possibility that they may be the first generation to see a shorter life expectancy than their parents due to poor health. Key contributors to this trend are the modern pediatric epidemics of obesity, asthma, learning disabilities, and autism. For all of these conditions, the child's environment plays a role in causing, contributing to or mitigating these chronic conditions. The estimated costs of environmental disease in children (such as lead poisoning, childhood cancer, and asthma) were \$76.6 billion in 2008.¹

Investments in programs that protect and promote children's health will be repaid by healthier children with brighter futures.

Additionally, protecting our children -- those born as well as those yet to be born -- from environmental hazards is truly a national security issue. 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. American competitiveness depends on having healthy, educated children who grow up to be healthy productive adults. 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 support and expand children's environmental health programs. Key programs in your jurisdiction deserving your 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

¹ Trasande, Liu Y. "Reducing The Staggering Costs Of Environmental Disease In Children, Estimated At \$76.6 Billion In 2008," *Health Affairs*. No. (2011): doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2010.1239

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 2015.

The **National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH)** is particularly important in protecting the environmental health of young children. Current research is uncovering the extensive role that environment plays in human health and development. As a result, NCEH partners with public health agencies and a wide range of other organizations to bring their expertise and support to an expanding scope of environmental-human health challenges. NCEH's programs are key national assets. Yet in recent years, NCEH funding has been drastically cut. We urge the Subcommittee to at least restore NCEH to its FY2010 funding level of \$181.1 million.

We were deeply concerned with the FY 2012 gutting of the **Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program** and we commend you for the substantial increase the program received in FY2014. This program helps to prevent lead poisoning and helps children who have already been exposed to lead. Much more needs to be done just to return it to FY 2011 levels. Millions of American children remain at risk of lead poisoning and need this program, which supports effective local and state efforts. As evidence increasingly demonstrates no safe level of lead exposure for children, this funding is all the more essential. We join with the National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition to urge a funding level of \$29 million in FY 2015.

NCEH's **National Asthma Control Program** not only has greatly increased data collection about this rampant epidemic but it also encourages states to use evidence-based approaches to reduce costs and improve outcomes for people living with asthma. Asthma is an epidemic in the U.S., affecting 10% of our nation's children. We urge the Committee to fund this vital program at \$28 million in FY 2015.

Public health officials need integrated health and environmental data so that they can protect the public's health. 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. Participation in the tracking network development will decline under further cuts and erase the progress we have made across the country to better link data with public health action.

National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS)

NIEHS is the leading institute conducting research to understand how the environment influences human health. Unlike other NIH Institutes focused on one disease or one body system, NIEHS is charged with all diseases, all human health and body systems, as they are affected by the environment – a vital and monumental charge. NIEHS plays a critical role in our efforts to understand how to protect children, whether it is identifying and understanding the immediate impact of chemical substances or understanding childhood exposures that may not affect health until decades later. CEHN recommends that \$717.7 million be provided for NIEHS' FY 2015 budget.

Children's Environmental Health Research Centers of Excellence

The Children's Environmental Health & Disease Prevention Research Centers, jointly funded by the NIEHS and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and located at research institutions across the nation, play a vital role in providing the scientific basis for protecting children from environmental hazards. With their modest budgets, these centers are generating invaluable research. For example, these centers conducted the recent research that

found links between prenatal exposures to either a common air pollutant or a common pesticide to lower IQs and poorer working memory at age 7.

Several Centers have established longitudinal cohorts, which in some cases are more than 10 years old. The ability to look for linkages between exposures and health outcomes in infants, toddlers, and, now, adolescents, is vital. If these cohorts are disbanded due to funding cuts, at best it will take years and untold resources before it is possible to replicate them. Few if any longitudinal cohort studies on adolescents, puberty and environmental exposures exist. The Network is concerned that inadequate funding may result in the loss of these valuable cohorts. We urge the Subcommittee to support these centers at \$33 million in FY 2015.

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSUs) form a valuable resource network for parents and clinicians around the nation. They are funded jointly by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the EPA with a very modest budget. PEHSU professionals provide medical consultation to health care professionals 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 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 2015.

In conclusion, our nation's future will depend upon its future leaders. Protecting children from harmful chemicals in their environment will result in healthier children with brighter futures, an outcome we can all support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.