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August 31, 2019

Committee Chair Raul Grijalva
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Congressman A. Donald McEachin
314 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chair Grijalva, Congressman McEachin, and Members of the Natural Resources Committee:

Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) is a member of the Environmental Justice and Health Alliance (EJHA) for Chemical Policy Reform. ACAT is a non-profit public interest environmental health and justice research and advocacy organization that works closely with Alaska and Arctic Indigenous communities to eliminate exposure to toxics and protect the health of highly exposed communities.

As a member of the EJHA, we also deeply appreciate your leadership and support the Statement of Principles for Environmental Justice legislation. In addition to the points provided by the EJHA to strengthen the Statement of Principles, we offer the following points:

Northern and Arctic Indigenous Peoples are among the most highly exposed people in the world to persistent industrial chemicals. The Arctic is a hemispheric sink for persistent industrial chemicals and pesticides that are transported on wind and ocean currents hundreds of miles from distant manufacturing facilities, waste disposal sites, and incineration facilities in lower latitudes. These include legacy chemicals such as PCBs, DDT, and PBDEs, as well as chemicals in current use such as PFAS, organophosphate flame retardants, siloxanes, SCCPs, and registered pesticides. Indigenous peoples of Alaska have unique and cumulative exposures through consumption of traditional foods. Fish and marine mammal species are vital for the physical, spiritual, and cultural sustenance as traditional foods of Indigenous peoples of the north and Arctic. The Indigenous peoples of Alaska—as a result of the persistence and bioaccumulation of persistent industrial chemicals in the Arctic and their consumption of traditional foods that are highly contaminated—face greater cumulative exposures that cause health disparities. This contamination is a violation of human rights including the rights to health, food security and subsistence, and prior informed consent. Many Alaska Native communities are also in close proximity to formerly and currently used defense sites (approximately 700 formerly and currently used defense sites in Alaska), as well as mining, oil and gas industrial facilities that also cause harmful exposures. Alaska is warming faster than any other state in the U.S., and at least twice as fast as the rest of the planet as a whole. Climate warming in the north exacerbates the mobilization and transport of industrial chemicals—accelerated melting of polar snow, ice, and permafrost mobilizes sequestered contaminants and enhance air-to-sea exchange, rendering greater bioavailability of contaminants within arctic food webs.

We thank you for your consideration. We look forward to having the opportunity to contribute toward the development and passage of principled environmental justice legislation.

Sincerely,

Vi Waghiyi, Yupik Mother and Grandmother, and Environmental Health and Justice Program Director,
Alaska Community Action on Toxics

Pamela Miller, Executive Director, Alaska Community Action on Toxics