

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 08, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Biden:

Congratulations on your recent inauguration. We are thankful for your continued efforts to prioritize environmental protection as a part of your plan to build back better and address the needs of frontline and fence-line communities through your environmental justice plan. We write today to urge your Administration to take needed steps to improve indoor air quality and ventilation energy efficiency in our nation's schools, with a special eye towards environmental justice and low-wealth communities which are disproportionately affected by toxic air pollution.

As our country continues to suffer from the devastating impacts of COVID-19 and more severe natural disasters due to the climate crisis, existing issues with school ventilation and air quality have been exacerbated by the pandemic. A recent Government Accountability Office study revealed that even before the ongoing health crisis, about half of the school districts in our country needed to update or replace multiple systems like heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) or plumbing¹. This need is even more pressing for communities of color and low wealth communities who have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic and have historically suffered from air pollution exposure at disproportionate rates². As school districts reopen nationwide, it will be essential to improve indoor air quality technology in schools to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and the risk of wildfire smoke, especially after a grueling wildfire season.

Comprehensive initiatives such as H.R. 604, *Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act (RASA)*, provide a path forward to address crucial infrastructural needs and inequities in our nation's schools. In addition to supporting the enactment of RASA, we urge you to support the creation of a dedicated program under the Department of Energy in collaboration with the Environmental

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/707374.pdf#page84>

² <https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/who-is-at-risk/disparities>

Protection Agency and the Department of Education to overhaul HVAC systems in schools, especially those in environmental justice communities. High indoor air quality and ventilation in schools is crucial for students' health and is necessary for a quality learning environment where children can reach their full potential³. This program could be used to tackle some of these issues by providing funding for upgrades, replacements, and long-term maintenance to HVAC units, especially in schools that historically suffered from health and environmental disparities.

Additionally, as a part of the fight against climate change and our transition to a clean energy future, we urge you to prioritize clean and energy-efficient HVAC upgrades as a part of this program and include funding for schools' energy efficiency efforts in any infrastructure proposal. Inadequate ventilation systems can significantly increase energy demand if units are not properly installed or poorly maintained⁴ and ensuring that our schools are equipped with clean ventilation technology is an important step in our commitment to advancing sustainable infrastructure. We must also ensure that upgrades meet ventilation and filtration recommendations for reopening schools set forth by the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

As your administration has wisely noted, our country currently sits at the intersection of racial justice, public health, climate, and economic crises and it is crucial to address these issues head-on to protect our nation's youth. We look forward to working together to improve the health, environment, and energy efficiency in schools nationwide as we navigate these compounded crises during a time of turmoil but renewed hope.

Sincerely,



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

/s/

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

/s/

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

/s/

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/indoor-air-quality-high-performance-schools#how>

⁴ [Microsoft Word - White Paper on Proposed School Ventilation and Efficiency Verification and Repair Program Energy Focus_V3_2008 \(ucdavis.edu\)](#)

/s/

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

/s/

Jesús "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

/s/

Michael F.Q. San Nicolas
Member of Congress

/s/

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

/s/

Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

/s/

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

/s/

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

/s/

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

/s/

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

/s/

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

/s/

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

/s/

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

/s/

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

/s/

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

/s/

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

/s/

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

/s/

William R. Keating
Member of Congress