

August 30, 2019

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Donald McEachin
314 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Representative McEachin,

On behalf of Breast Cancer Prevention Partners, I am writing in strong support of your Statement of Principles for Environmental Justice Legislation. We commend your vision and leadership in developing these important Principles and look forward to working with you on implementation moving forward.

Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (BCPP) is a national organization focused solely on preventing breast cancer by reducing exposure to chemicals and radiation linked, by peer-reviewed science, to an increased risk of the disease. We work with advocates and decision-makers to encourage research and policy initiatives to better understand and reduce exposures to toxic environmental chemicals that contribute to increased rates of breast cancer and other diseases.

Environmental justice issues are an integral and growing part our mission and work. The chemicals that have been identified by science as increasing the risk of breast cancer are all too often the same chemicals that communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately exposed to – with devastating affects. These chemicals are not just linked to breast cancer, but often to other cancers, reproductive harm, neurological and developmental harm, and numerous other negative health impacts.

Expanding Cumulative Impacts to Consider Consumer Products and Worker Exposures

The Cumulative Impacts plank of your Principles is particularly important, and one that we strongly support. Consideration of cumulative impacts is crucial not only permitting and siting of polluting facilities and other projects; it should also be applied to any safety assessments of consumer products, such as personal care and beauty products. The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, a project of Breast Cancer Prevention Partners, is a coalition of NGOs and clean cosmetic companies advocating for federal legislation to eliminate chemicals linked to adverse health impacts from personal care and beauty products. The \$84 billion personal care and beauty product industry is one of the least regulated consumer product industries. As a result, it is

perfectly legal for companies to use dangerous chemicals, including chemicals linked to breast cancer, in products people use every day. The Campaign has long advocated for FDA safety reviews of products that take into account cumulative exposures given the reality that consumers do not just use one personal care product at a time; rather, studies show that the average American woman uses approximately 12 products daily. Industry's frequent argument that "a little bit" of a carcinogen, such as formaldehyde in baby shampoo, isn't harmful never takes into account that a little bit of a toxic chemical from the numerous products that consumers are exposed to can add up to substantial exposure, day in and day out.

The failure of the federal government to regulate the safety of consumer products, such as personal care and beauty products and cleaning products, impacts all Americans, but also has a disproportional impact on communities of color and low income communities. Workers that use these products daily for multiple hours a day, such as domestic workers, janitors, hair and nail salon workers, are disproportionately people of color, and often economically disadvantaged. Cumulative exposure assessments should also consider these worker exposures which are far higher than the average consumer.

Personal care and beauty products marketed to women of color are among the most toxic on the market. In recent testing BCPP conducted, the product that contained the highest number of chemicals linked to harm to human health and the environment was a shampoo marketed to kids of color: Just for Me Shampoo made by Strength of Nature. Similarly, Dollar Stores contain numerous products with hazardous chemicals, including some ingredients that have been banned in the European Union. Dollar stores are often one of the few retail stores found in communities that already bear a high burden of harmful exposures, adding to the cumulative impact of toxic exposures.

Making Public Input Opportunities Accessible to Local Communities

Your Principle on strengthening the National Environmental Policy Act specifically calls for federal agencies to expand and make more accessible opportunities to provide public comment on decisions impacting environmental justice communities. In addition to requiring public hearings and translation of information into relevant languages, both of which are critically important, we suggest including a requirement that federal agencies hold at least some of those public hearings in an impacted community and schedule the hearing with enough advance notice for interested and affected community members to make arrangements to attend. Conducting hearings in Washington, DC with a week or two notice makes it impossible for resource-strapped communities to meaningfully participate in decisions that most directly impact them. EPA and other federal agencies should hold hearings around the country to expand access.

Placing the Burden of Proof on Industry

We encourage you to considering adding to your Principles language that clearly places the burden of proof on industry to show that a specific chemical exposure, and the cumulative exposure to which it contributes, is safe, rather than requiring communities with extremely limited resources to show that a proposed exposure and the cumulative burden will be harmful. Moreover, 100% proof of actual or impending harm should NOT be the standard for requiring health-protective action. Credible evidence of potential harm as a standard enables a precautionary approach to policy decisions, valuing the protection of human health above the interests of industry. Finally, industry should not be allowed to obfuscate the impact of harmful chemical exposures by blaming communities for their health problems, arguing that their “lifestyle” choices are the true reason for health inequities rather than cumulative toxic chemical exposures. This blaming of individuals, rather than looking at systemic exposures, further discriminates against already overburdened communities.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical issue. We strongly support the Statement of Principles for Environmental Justice Legislation and urge you to apply them to future legislation. BCPP stands ready to support you in those efforts.

Sincerely,

Amanda Heier
President and CEO