

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 27, 2022

The Honorable Jeffrey A. Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

As you develop the Fiscal Year 2023 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies subcommittee appropriations bill, we write to request that you provide \$20 million in funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) wildfire smoke monitoring programs and that you include the below report language to ensure equity.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, exposure to air pollutants, like PM_{2.5} particles in wildfire smoke, can cause inflammation, alter immune function, irritate the lungs, and increase susceptibility to respiratory infections. Additionally, the harmful toxins from wildfire smoke can contaminate soil, water, and indoor dust. Inhaling these toxins are particularly harmful for older adults, children, and people with heart or lung disease, including asthma. As with many environmental hazards, wildfire smoke pollution disproportionately affects low-income and historically marginalized communities. To address this disparity, Congress must ensure that the tools our federal agencies use to inform the public about wildfire risks are accurate, equitable, and serve diverse communities.

The EPA's wildfire smoke monitoring network utilizes technologies to support supplemental air monitoring in areas affected by wildfire smoke. The EPA and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) launched the AirNow Fire and Smoke Map in 2021, which combines data from EPA's air monitoring network with data from low-cost sensors to improve air quality and smoke information available to the public in both English and Spanish during fire events. The air quality data is available for the public through AirNow, which consolidates the updated data collected from monitors positioned throughout the U.S. and makes it readily available. These monitors, however, are currently concentrated in more affluent communities, despite the fact that the dangers of wildfire smoke and poor air quality are not limited to these areas.

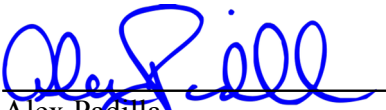
The President's Budget requests \$12.7 million for the EPA to improve communications related to wildfires and air quality and to expand local smoke monitoring capacity. However, as we continue to experience historic fire activity and resulting wildfire smoke across the western United States, we must ensure equitable monitoring for all communities. Therefore, we urge you to provide \$20 million for this important work, and we ask that you include report language to increase equity and ensure that new monitors are placed in new areas that do not currently have adequate monitoring capabilities.

Wildfire Smoke Monitoring. – The Committee commends EPA for its efforts through the AirNow Fire and Smoke Map to better forecast and communicate the impact of wildfire smoke on communities. However, the committee is concerned that air quality monitors are not currently distributed equitably across impacted communities and provides \$5,000,000 in addition to the budget request to increase the number and density of air quality monitors in traditionally underserved or under monitored communities.

As wildfires become increasingly frequent and destructive, smoke will become an ever more present reality in our communities as well as those across the country. It is critical that we be proactive in ensuring that our monitoring systems are well equipped to equitably protect public health from the hazardous effects of wildfire smoke.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



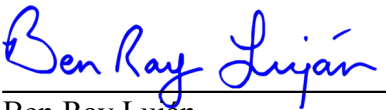
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



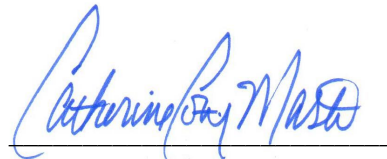
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Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator