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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

RICHARD M. RUSSELL, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
GABRIELLE BATKIN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

May 4, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

On March 21, 2017, David A. Bloom, the acting Chief Financial Officer at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), sent a memo to acting executives at EPA providing guidance on how the Trump Administration could achieve the budget cuts proposed in the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Blueprint. This guidance included a proposal for rent avoidance at “several regional and headquarters offices Potomac Yards North, Region 1, Region 5, and Region 9, the decommissioning of part of the Las Vegas laboratory, and the release of the headquarters warehouse in Washington D.C.”

We are deeply troubled by the guidance in the March 21 memo, which appears to validate prior public reports that the Office of Management and Budget directed EPA to eliminate two EPA Regions, and seek your personal commitment that no regional office, including those listed above, or program office, including both the Great Lakes National and Chesapeake Bay program offices, will be closed or consolidated.

For EPA to deliver on its mission of protecting our public health and our environment, it must be able to work with state and local governments on the distinct issues that face each region. This is why regional offices are so critical: state environmental agencies depend on technical assistance and consultation from their specific regional office. Whether reviewing discharge permits for compliance with Federal pollution standards and state water quality standards, or inspecting facilities to see if they are operating in compliance with their permits, we count on regional staff to provide guidance to state pollution control staff, the public and regulated entities.

Simply put, EPA regional offices are critical to addressing the unique challenges facing their communities. As you acknowledged during your confirmation hearing, an important lesson from the Flint water crisis was the need to empower regional offices and make sure EPA civil servants possess the resources and the authority to act proactively when a state fails to protect its citizens. Families across our country rely on EPA to serve as a last line of defense when it comes to protecting their children’s drinking water. Closing the regional offices will jeopardize their children’s safety and increase the likelihood of another Flint water crisis occurring in communities throughout the country.

Furthermore, we owe a depth of gratitude to the civil servants who have dedicated their careers to keeping their communities safe. EPA employees include some of the best among us: they are scientists, engineers, and environmental specialists who are responsible for the protection of our communities. Cutting these jobs in the name of efficiency is irresponsible and shortsighted.

Should you dismiss EPA regional staff, the agency would lose irreplaceable institutional knowledge and a deeper understanding of highly technical and regionally specific environmental issues.

Again, we ask you to reaffirm your commitment to the agency you are tasked with leading and to the families you took an oath to protect by ruling out the possibility that any regional or program EPA office will be closed or consolidated.

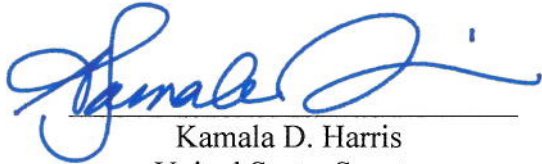
Sincerely,



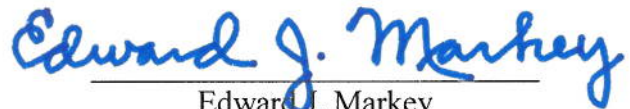
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United States Senator



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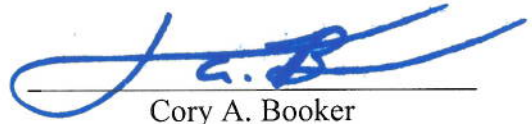
Benjamin Cardin
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Cory A. Booker in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator