

Organizational Sign On Letter:
Support Nuclear Frontline Communities in COVID-19 Economic Relief Funding
April 29, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Charles Schumer
United States Senate

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer,

As Congress continues to allocate crucial economic relief funding to communities in need, we write to urge you to include provisions for those who are more vulnerable to COVID-19 because of past and ongoing radiation exposure linked to nuclear weapons activities. We know that a key to reducing the spread of COVID-19 is ensuring that those at highest risk have access to the medical care they need.

U.S. nuclear weapons activities such as uranium mining, weapons production, and atmospheric nuclear testing exposed many individuals and communities in the United States to radiation and other toxic chemicals. These exposed populations are disproportionately Indigenous, people of color, veterans, low-income, and/or from rural areas, and often face significant barriers to receiving adequate health care. Many in these communities are now at greater risk from COVID-19 due to underlying factors including their radiation exposure, air, soil, and water pollution, poverty, poor nutrition, etc. These factors can result in underlying health conditions and weakened immune systems.

Those who sacrificed for our country's national security, in some cases unknowingly, should not have to doubly fear this crisis. **We call for the inclusion of provisions in the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments ([H.R. 3783](#) and [S. 947](#)) and the inclusion of Medicaid for COFA communities, as outlined in the Covering our FAS Allies Act ([H.R. 4821](#) and [S. 2218](#)), both bipartisan bills, in the next stimulus package.**

Include Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments in Stimulus Bills

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) of 1990 was established to help offset some of the health care costs that burden these affected groups. RECA has two shortcomings that you have the power to correct in the coming days: 1) Without Congressional action RECA will expire in 2022; 2) RECA does not cover everyone who was impacted by U.S. nuclear weapon development. Groups currently excluded include those living downwind of the [first atomic test in 1945 at Trinity in New Mexico](#), additional downwinders of the Nevada Test Site, veterans who cleaned up radioactive waste in the Marshall Islands, residents in Guam, uranium workers past 1971, and civilians downwind of nuclear production sites.

RECA is crucial for the health and financial well-being of these communities, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. [Recent studies](#) show that those with cancers, including lung cancers, are up to three times as likely to die of COVID-19 than those without cancer. Uranium miners are [especially susceptible](#) to lung cancer, including those from the [Navajo Nation](#). Today, the Navajo Nation and [Indigenous communities](#) in general are facing [unique challenges](#) in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tina Cordova, a downwinder of the Trinity Test and co-founder of Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium adds, “Many of us live in fear of the virus now not only because it is highly infectious and deadly to most but because we also know we are highly susceptible to getting the virus and dying from it due to our underlying health issues as a result of being exposed to radiation. Once you’ve been diagnosed with cancer and been through the radiation and chemotherapy necessary to save your life you know your immune system has been compromised.”

We support the provisions in H.R. 3783, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2019, and the similar bipartisan S. 947 in the Senate. We call to include the full provisions of these combined bills in any upcoming stimulus packages.

Include Medicaid for COFA Communities in Stimulus Bills

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) are critical U.S. national security and economic agreements with the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. Under these agreements, citizens of these countries may travel to, live, and work in the United States in exchange for the U.S. military’s exclusive use of and access to these nation’s lands, airspace, and waters.

COFA citizens in the United States originally had access to Medicaid. However, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 unintentionally stripped COFA communities living in the United States of their eligibility for most means-tested federal benefits, including Medicaid.

As a result, over 61,000 COFA individuals and families living in the United States have struggled to access essential medical care. Many face serious chronic conditions and health disparities, due to dependency on the United States, as well as the effects of military activity in the region, including 67 above-ground nuclear tests conducted in the Marshall Islands from 1946 - 1962. Marshallese Elder Erine Jitiam, who survived this testing and now lives in the United States shares: “There were a lot of deaths because of the fallout powder on Enewetak and Bikini...This is why we need the American’s help. Because the people continue to suffer from the bomb testings.”

The COVID-19 pandemic only heightens the risks these communities face through lack of care, including access to COVID-19 testing. Even before the pandemic, [studies are showing](#) that in COFA communities, higher death rates are associated with the loss of Medicaid after 1996. Today, [data shows](#) that Pacific Islanders in the United States, including the Marshallese, have a COVID-19 infection rate two to three times higher than average. In addition, many Marshallese community members have lost their jobs in the economic recession, meaning they have also lost employer-provided health insurance.

Due to these heightened risk factors, we must ensure these communities have the care they need during the COVID-19 crisis. We call for future stimulus packages to include provisions to reinstate Medicaid for COFA residents, and to extend and expand RECA, as laid out in H.R. 3783, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2019.

Sincerely,

Navajo Nation

Amber Kanazbah Crotty, Council Delegate, 24th Navajo Nation Council

National

Arms Control Association

Beyond Nuclear

Beyond the Bomb

Earthworks

Enewetak Atomic Cleanup Veterans

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Zero
National Association of Atomic Veterans, Inc. (NAAV)
National Nuclear Workers for Justice (NNWJ)
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Nukewatch
On Behalf Of Planet Earth
Pax Christi USA
PEAC Institute Peace Education & Art Communication
Peace Action
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Union of Concerned Scientists
Win Without War
Women's Action for New Directions (WAND)

Arizona

Don't Waste Arizona

Arkansas

Kbe Annex Arkansas
Marshallese Educational Initiative

California

CodePINK Women for Peace, Golden Gate Chapter
Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles
The Samuel Lawrence Foundation
San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace
Tri-Valley CAREs

Colorado

Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center

Florida

Physicians for Social Responsibility Florida

Idaho

Idaho Downwinders

Illinois

Nuclear Energy Information Service (NEIS)

Maine

Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter

Maryland

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Crabshell Alliance

Prevent Nuclear War Maryland

Massachusetts

Citizens Awareness Network

Pioneer Valley PSR

Michigan

Citizens' Resistance at Fermi 2 - CRAFT

Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes

Don't Waste Michigan

Nevada

Achorus Amorphous

Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force

New Mexico

Central New Mexico Chapter of Progressive Democrats of America

Citizen Action New Mexico

Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (CARD)

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety

Donald and Sally-Alice Thompson Veterans for Peace Chapter #63

La Jicarita

Navajo Uranium Radiation Victims Committee

Nuclear Issues Study Group

Nuclear Watch New Mexico

Partnership for Earth Spirituality

Taosenos for Peaceful and Sustainable Futures

Tewa Women United

Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium

New York

Citizens' Environmental Coalition
Environmental Justice Task Force of the WNY Peace Center
Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition
Ithaca Nuclear Disarmament Group
Peace Action New York State

Ohio

Portsmouth/Piketon Residents for Environmental Safety and Security (PRESS)
Toledo Coalition for Safe Energy

Oregon

Living Islands Non-Profit

Pennsylvania

Philadelphia Area Anti-Drone Network
Three Mile Island Alert, Inc.

South Carolina

Savannah River Site Watch

Texas

Nuclear Free World Committee of the Dallas Peace and Justice Center
The Peace Farm

Utah

Uranium Watch
Utah Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

Vermont

Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance

Washington

Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action
Heart of America NW
Micah
No More Bombs
Peace Action Group of Plymouth Church Seattle, UCC
Physicians for a National Health Program - Western Washington Chapter

Seattle Anti-War Coalition
Seattle Fellowship of Reconciliation
Veterans For Peace Chapter 111
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
West Seattle Neighbors for Peace and Justice
Western Washington Fellowship of Reconciliation
Whatcom Peace & Justice Center

Guam

Pacific Association for Radiation Survivors

Canada

Friends of Bruce

Marshall Islands

Kili/Bikini/Ejit Local Government
REACH-MI