

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 20, 2020

Hon. Betty McCollum, Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. David Joyce, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

As you draft the FY21 Interior, the Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, we ask that you include report language preventing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from closing the Region 6 Houston Laboratory (“Lab” hereinafter) and relocating its employees to another facility 400 miles away in Ada, Oklahoma, as is currently proposed.

Houston is home to a large number of chemical plants and refineries, and this Lab and its highly trained staff are essential to EPA’s mission of protecting human health and the environment. In the case of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes or severe rain events, these scientists are among Houston’s essential first responders. This closure will undoubtedly cause the forced retirement of many EPA employees and threaten Houston’s access to the critical air, water, and soil testing performed at the Lab and the return of results as quickly as possible.

The EPA Inspector General’s report investigating the EPA response to Hurricane Harvey, published on December 16, 2019, found that the EPA needs to improve its emergency response to air quality concerns during disasters. The audit also highlighted the Region 6 Office’s successful deployment of more than 80 staffers as community liaisons. In areas affected by Harvey, these staffers provided important information to the public about how to protect themselves. The loss of important EPA staff will negatively impact emergency response in the future, just as our community experiences more intense and frequent storms and other disasters.

Despite concerns from stakeholders and Members of Congress, on February 19, 2020, Deputy Regional Administrator David Gray met with Lab staff to announce that this relocation will occur no later than June 2022. Mr. Gray stated that an On-scene Coordinator will remain located in Houston to handle emergency response. This is insufficient, however, because the analytical resources will all be in Oklahoma, and the increased transportation time during emergencies - whether natural disasters or commercial accidents - will jeopardize the health and safety of our community.

We, therefore, request that you include report language to be offered under the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill that would prevent the EPA from closing the Region 6 Houston Laboratory and relocating its employees.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to address this important issue.

Sincerely,



Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

FY21 Language Request to Prevent EPA Region 6 Houston Lab Co-Location  
List of Signatories

Al Green

Marc Veasey

Sheila Jackson Lee

Vincente Gonzalez

Cedric Richmond