Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 21, 2016

Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

We write to respectfully urge greater federal attention to address poor air quality issues caused by air pollution from ports and other emissions-emitting freight transportation systems. While we appreciate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Ports Initiative, our communities face an environmental justice and public health crisis that necessitates even more aggressive action to decrease the adverse health impacts of port pollution. We request that the EPA take further action to encourage the transition to cleaner energy sources that reduce emissions in ports and freight networks to help alleviate their negative effects on vulnerable communities.

The nation's freight transportation system is a great asset to our economy. It produces a substantial number of transportation, logistics, and distribution jobs, and facilitates the reliable movement of materials and products that increase American productivity and quality of life. However, 13 million people, including 3.5 million children, are concentrated in the vicinity of transportation facilities and are exposed to unhealthy levels of air pollution from busy diesel trucking routes, ocean-going vessels, cargo handling equipment, railroad locomotives, and cargo handling equipment. The exposure of residents, especially children, to port pollution results in increased risk for cancer, missed school days, and more hospital visits.

In addition to the public health and environmental justice concerns, poor air quality has an economic impact. It is estimated that 25.9 million Americans have asthma, including 7.1 million children. This chronic illness accounts for approximately 15 million missed or less productive work days, 14 million missed school days, and billions of dollars in social and economic costs.

We commend the EPA for its focus on environmental justice issues through the EPA Office of Environmental Justice, replacing diesel engines through the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) Ports Initiative, and implementing programs to reduce emissions from stationary sources. However, mobile sources of air toxins that converge at U.S. ports, railyards, and transit centers are a growing problem due to a regulatory framework for ports and freight that lags behind other national air quality initiatives. As a result, these communities disproportionately experience serious health problems, including asthma, lung and heart disease, and other respiratory ailments.

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Before the end of this administration, we encourage the EPA to take action to encourage the use, research, and development of zero emissions transportation technologies and to minimize freight emissions. We must also reduce emissions at sea and inland ports and the freight corridors that serve them by developing new national standards to limit pollution to safe levels, assist state and local governments to address freight-generated pollution through Clean Air Act state implementation plans, and engage communities affected by freight pollution in each EPA Region of the country to give them a greater voice in emissions reductions goals and actions.

Technologies exist that can allow port communities to reduce and, eventually, eliminate these emissions. Transitioning to low or zero emissions technologies presents an opportunity to reduce CO2 emissions and provide a positive impact on the health of individuals living near ports. With freight tonnage expected to increase by 45 percent by 2040, addressing this issue now is extremely important to prevent even more devastating air pollution in the future.

We are dedicated to ensuring clean air, health, and a safe environment for all of our nation's communities, and respectfully urge the EPA to take action to address poor air quality caused by air pollution from ports and other emissions emitting transportation systems.

Sincerely,

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress

Richard M. Nolan
Member of Congress

Janice Hahn
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress