

Organizational Sign-On Letter:
Support Survivors of U.S. Nuclear Weapons
July 21, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Charles Schumer
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate

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

We, the undersigned, call on Congress to support survivors of U.S. nuclear weapons testing and uranium mining by strengthening and extending the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. We represent a diverse coalition of scientists, historians, veterans, impacted communities, tribal nations, and peace and security advocates.

This summer moviegoers watching “Oppenheimer” will be reminded of the remarkable—and controversial—effort to create the atomic bomb. The film focuses on the first nuclear weapon test, but nearly 80 years later, survivors of that test and their descendants are still waiting for the U.S. government to help them cope with the impact of radiation exposure. While “Oppenheimer” looks back at history, the harm Trinity and subsequent nuclear tests did to survivors is still a present-day problem that needs to be addressed.

Impacted communities were unknowingly on the frontlines of World War II and the Cold War. It is a tragic fact that, in an effort to protect us from our enemies, the U.S. government poisoned its own people. We must honor those who sacrificed their health for our country’s national security.

U.S. nuclear weapons activities, including uranium mining, weapons production, and atmospheric nuclear testing, exposed many individuals and communities in the United States to radiation and toxic chemicals. These exposed populations are often Indigenous, people of color, veterans, low-income, and rural, and they often face significant obstacles to receiving adequate health care.

In 1990, Congress passed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) to offset some of the health care costs that burden these affected groups. It established a valuable program that has bipartisan support, but it was also significantly flawed.

Strengthening RECA by including comprehensive health care benefits and extending support to affected communities that are currently excluded is the least the government could do for people living with the legacy of U.S. nuclear tests and uranium mining.

The groups that are currently excluded include people who lived downwind from the first atomic test in 1945 at the Trinity site in New Mexico, some of the people who lived downwind from the

Nevada Test Site, U.S. veterans who cleaned up radioactive waste in the Marshall Islands, residents of Guam who were exposed to nuclear tests in the Pacific, uranium workers after 1971, and civilians living downwind from nuclear production sites. All of these people also deserve—and need—RECA benefits.

In 2022, Congress passed a two-year extension for RECA, which is now set to expire in June 2024. This year, Congress must strengthen RECA and extend it to ensure that the thousands of Americans suffering from radiation-related illnesses receive the help they need.

Signed,

Individuals

* These signatories have signed on their own behalf, and not for their affiliated institutions

Gar Alperovitz, historian, author of “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb”

Kai Bird, historian, coauthor of “American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer”

Rachel Bronson, President & CEO, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

Thomas Cochran, former director, Nuclear Program, Natural Resources Defense Council

John Erath, senior policy director, Council for a Livable World

Richard Healey, former publisher, Nuclear Times magazine

Roald Hoffmann, Frank H. T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters, emeritus, Cornell University, 1981 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

John Isaacs, senior fellow, Council for a Livable World

Daryl Kimball, executive director, Arms Control Association

Roger D. Kornberg, Professor, Stanford University, 2006 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Connor Murray, advocacy coordinator, Council for a Livable World

Elliott Negin, former editor, Nuclear Times magazine

Bill Nye, science educator

Buu Nygren, President of the Navajo Nation

Robert S. Norris, historian, author of “Racing for the Bomb: The True Story of General Leslie R. Groves, the Man Behind the Birth of the Atomic Age”

George Takei, actor and activist

John Tierney, executive director, Council for a Livable World

Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe

David Wright, visiting scholar, MIT Laboratory for Nuclear Security and Policy

Carlo Rovelli, theoretical physicist, Professeur de classe exceptionnelle in the Department of Physics at Aix-Marseille University

Martin Chalfie, Professor, Columbia University, 2008 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Tribal Nations

Navajo Nation

Organizations

Art Not War

Atomic Cleanup Veterans

Back from the Brink

Baltimore Nonviolence Center

Baltimore Phil Berrigan Memorial Veterans For Peace

Beyond Nuclear

Bombshelltoe Policy x Arts Collective

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes

Columbia Remembrance Committee

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety

CreateSpace/KDP Kindle Direct Publishing

Downwinders of Mohave County, Arizona

Ecological Options Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Gender and Radiation Impact Project

Georgia WAND

Global Zero

Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah (HEAL Utah)

LABRATS

Laguna Acoma Coalition For A Safe Environment

La Jicarita

Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment

National Association of Atomic Veterans

Native Community Action Council

Navajo Nation Washington Office

Navajo, Red Water Pond Road Community Association

No More Bombs

Nuclear Hotseat Podcast/Broadcast

Nuclear Threat Initiative

Nuclear Watch New Mexico

Nuclear Watch South

Nukewatch

Pacific Association for Radiation Survivors Guam

Partnership for Earth Spirituality

Peace Action

Peace Action New York State

Peace Resource Center at Wilmington College

PeaceWorks - Kansas City

Physicians for Social Responsibility

Physicians for Social Responsibility - Greater Boston

Physicians for Social Responsibility - Kansas City

Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles

Physicians for Social Responsibility, Maine Chapter

Ploughshares Fund

Prevent Nuclear War Maryland

Rachel Carson Council

Radiation and Public Health Project

School Sisters of Notre Dame CP JPIC Office

Sisters of St. Joseph-TOSF Leadership Team

SouthWest Uranium Miners' Coalition Post '71

Tewa Women United

Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment)

Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium

Union of Concerned Scientists

United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries

Utah Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, UCAN

Utah Downwinders

Veterans For Peace, Chapter #63 (Albuquerque)

Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility

Western States Legal Foundation

Western WA Fellowship of Reconciliation Seattle Chapter

Win Without War

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, San Francisco and East Bay Branches

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, US section