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Administrator Scott Pruitt
U.S. Environmental Protect Agency
Office of the Administrator (#1101A)
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Administrator Pruitt,

I am writing to you today to officially tender my resignation as the Assistant Associate Administrator for Environmental Justice at the Environmental Protection Agency, effective Wednesday March 8, 2017. Over the past 24 years, I have been blessed with the opportunity to work with a number of Administrators of both parties, starting with William Riley and ending with yourself. During that time, I have watched each of them weigh the enormous challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities that exist in protecting public health and the environment of our great country. I have also been fortunate to work with an incredible group of talented and innovative staff, who are equally as committed to ensuring that all Americans have Clean Air to breathe, Clean Water to drink and Clean Land that our children can play on and farmers can grow healthy crops.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that while we have made great strides in protecting the air, water and land for most of our citizens, there are still many disproportionate environmental impacts occurring in our most vulnerable communities. Communities of color, low-income communities and indigenous populations are still struggling to receive equal protections before the law. These communities both rural and urban often live in areas with toxic levels of air pollution, crumbling or non-existent water and sewer infrastructure, lead in their drinking water, brownfields from vacant former industrial and commercial sites, Superfund and other hazardous waste sites, as well as other sources of exposures to pollutants. Despite the many challenges we face regarding the impacts of pollution and a changing climate, we have just as many effective tools and programs, with long track records of assisting vulnerable communities in meeting their goals of improving public health and enhancing the environmental quality of their local communities.

Over the past twenty-four years, having worked with more than five hundred communities, I have learned a few things I want to share with you. The first is, “Communities Speak for Themselves”. When we listen and then work collaboratively with our stakeholders, some very productive actions can happen that have real positive change in local communities. Secondly, is the need to recognize and support the incredible wealth of knowledge and innovative ideas that exists in the communities that we serve. A number of our most successful programs and grants evolved out of recommendations from “Frontline” communities. These recommendations grew into programs that have assisted many communities in their journey from Surviving to Thriving. So, when I hear we are considering making cuts to grant programs like the EJ small grants or Collaborative Problem Solving programs, which have assisted over 1400 communities, I

wonder if our new leadership has had the opportunity to converse with those who need our help the most. I strongly encourage you and your team to continue promoting agency efforts to validate these communities' concerns, and value their lives.

The Brownfields program, which focuses on cleaning up formerly contaminated sites, has had huge, positive impacts in vulnerable communities. These often, abandoned sites are usually located in environmentally and economically vulnerable communities. The EPA Brownfields program provides an opportunity to reduce the impacts from legacy pollution, creates jobs and develops a skilled workforce through the worker training program. Any cuts to this program will increase the public health impacts and decrease the economic opportunities in these communities whom often have higher unemployment rates. Maintaining this important investment is a powerful demonstration of EPA's commitment to value these communities and the people's lives within them. Brownfields revitalization also makes good economic sense. Through fiscal year 2016, on average, \$16.11 was leveraged for each EPA Brownfields dollar and 8.5 jobs leveraged per \$100,000 of EPA brownfields funds expended on assessment, cleanup, and revolving loan fund cooperative agreements.

We often forget that the choices we make on regulations affecting clean air, clean water and enforcement are interconnected with the lives of our vulnerable communities and tribal populations. Communities have shared with me over the past two decades how important the enforcement work at the Agency is in protecting their often forgotten and overlooked communities. They feel that when done properly, enforcement plays a critical role in ensuring that all communities, especially those with environmental justice concerns are being protected from serious threats from chemical hazards and ensuring that their air, water, and land are safe. By ensuring that there is equal protection and enforcement in these communities, EPA plays a significant role in addressing unintended impacts and improving some of the public health disparities that often exist from exposure to pollution.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "We may have come to these shores on different ships, but we are now all in the same boat". The upcoming choices you make will have significant impacts on the public health and environment of our country. Those choices can stand as a beacon of hope, and as a powerful role model to the rest of the world on our priorities and values. Those choices will be magnified ten-fold in our most vulnerable communities and will highlight the value we place on the lives in those communities who are too often overlooked and forgotten.

I believe that you can assist these communities in their journey towards equity and justice by continuing the Senior Advisor for Environmental Justice position on your leadership team. This position will allow you to identify, prioritize and strategize about important issues, and provide you with an enhanced understanding of how future policy decisions may have unintended disproportionate impacts on these communities. Also, continuing to support the Office of Environmental Justice which has played a significant role in bringing communities, states, local and tribal governments, business and industry and other key stakeholders together to find collaborative solutions to many of the country's most serious environmental and public health issues and concerns.

The President has shared that he will focus on strengthening the Urban core and Appalachia. He also shared when in Flint, Michigan in 2016, that he would fix the drinking water issues once he was elected. These focus areas have strong environmental justice and equitable development components. The EPA is fortunate to have staff with expertise in these areas, that can help you achieve those goals that the President has identified.

Administrator, you also have a great resource in the Environmental Justice Inter-Agency Working Group (EJIWG), which you chair. This group is made up of 17 Federal Agencies who can assist you in developing a holistic approach in addressing the challenges and opportunities that many communities

with environmental justice concerns face on a daily basis. With shrinking budgets and a more streamlined approach by our new Administration, I'm sure you will be looking for opportunities to leverage resources and technical expertise to meet the needs of our most vulnerable communities. The EJIWG has also played a role in many placed based projects over the years that have worked with local communities to identify their most pressing needs. There are examples like the ReGenesis project in Spartanburg, SC, where a community leveraged a \$25,000 EJ small grant into millions of dollars in positive local changes - creating jobs and improving their environments through collaborative partnerships. One of the points that you shared with staff in your recent town hall was that you were looking for opportunities to balance the environment and the economy. The environmental justice work and other placed-based programs at EPA have focused on collaboration with states, local governments, tribes, the private sector, and local communities. There are countless examples of how the local communities vision for revitalization have grown into productive collaborative partnerships. I hope you will find time on your calendar to visit with these communities and see firsthand the challenges and transformational work that is happening.

Administrator Pruitt, I know we both understand the commitment we made to the American people when we each raised our right hand and said that, “ *I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.*” You have 15,000 EPA staff at Headquarters and in our 10 Regions and Labs who are equally committed to supporting and upholding those protections.

Administrator Pruitt, you have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring people together, to ensure that all communities have safe places to live, learn, work, play and pray and to ensure that our most vulnerable communities, who have been struggling for clean air to breathe and clean water to drink becomes a reality for them and their children. I wish you well as you move forward on protecting the public health and environment of our nation, and as you help to make the American Dream a reality for all.

Blessings,

Mustafa Santiago Ali