United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write today regarding the recent dismissal of several members of the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We also take this opportunity to voice our strong opposition to the substantial funding cuts for EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) as has reportedly been proposed in the President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2018. We are greatly concerned that these administrative actions will impact the agency's ability to develop and strengthen the effectiveness of drinking water health advisories or promulgate new drinking water standards for unregulated and emerging contaminants, as required by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA).

Safe drinking water is critical to the public health, wellbeing and economic vitality of our nation. While America's drinking water is the safest in the world, unregulated emerging contaminants, such as perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) and 1,4-dioxane, are increasingly being detected in drinking water systems in New Hampshire and across the country. PFCs have emerged as a widespread contaminant to the drinking water sources in several southern New Hampshire towns, and were responsible for the closing of a major water supply well located at the former Pease Air Force Base. Little is known about the long-term cumulative effects of emerging contaminants on human health, and this has caused great public concern for many of our constituents.

Pursuant to the SDWA, EPA is required to routinely identify and analyze unregulated and emerging contaminants and provide guidance to states, local officials and the public about the potential health risks and acceptable contamination levels for these materials. Without effective counsel from the BOSC and the SAB, it is difficult to see how EPA can effectively perform this mission. Both boards, comprised mostly of academic experts, provide balanced, authoritative advice to help ensure that EPA uses the best possible science and methodology in its research and policy-making. This includes agency actions to improve our understanding of the risks associated with emerging contaminants.

It is imperative that EPA's science advisory boards remain unbiased and independent of outside influence. This is especially true for the SAB, as EPA is statutorily required to consult with this body prior to publishing a list of unregulated drinking water contaminants that the agency finds may require regulation, or establishing maximum contaminant level goals and national primary drinking water regulations that govern our water safety.

Therefore, we strongly disagree with recent statements from EPA officials suggesting that the composition of the BOSC should better include regulated stakeholders. We have spoken with many Granite Staters who are worried that their families, including their children, could get sick from drinking contaminated water. Replacing academic scientists with representatives from special interest groups, especially from those whose pollution the agency is supposed to regulate would compromise scientific impartiality, elevates business interests above the public interest, and ignores very real concerns of the American people.

There is a critical need to address human exposure to emerging contaminants in drinking water sources and attend to any potential adverse health effects or other impact on our communities. As the lead federal agency tasked with protecting human health and the environment, EPA must reassure Americans that the agency's decisions are in their best interest and not a result of industry pressure or political influence. As you consider new appointments to the BOSC and evaluate the current SAB membership, we urge you to respect EPA's long-standing tradition of ensuring impartiality by appointing academic experts who are at the leading edge of research and have expert understanding of the underlying science.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Shaheen

JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senator

Maggie Hassan

MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator