Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 12, 2019

Mr. Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Re: Closure of EPA Region 6 Laboratory in Houston, TX

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

We write to express our dismay that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed the closure of the EPA Region 6 Houston Laboratory ("Lab" hereinafter), a full-service analytical Lab which serves Arizona, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. While the Lab employees have been asked to relocate to Ada, Oklahoma, over the next 18 months, many employees will choose instead to retire rather than relocate because of the hardship this will impose on them. Family obligations, medical needs, and financial responsibilities are all major factors to consider in any relocation. Employees would be forced to uproot their lives to keep their jobs. For many, this may be impossible.

We are concerned that this closure could be perceived as a tactic to shrink the overall number of EPA employees needed to protect human health and the environment. The closing of the Lab in Houston, with its high concentration of chemical plants and refineries, is counterproductive to the EPA's mission.

The proposed closure will result in the forced retirement of many affected EPA employees. The EPA Region 6 employees comprise highly-trained and skilled analytical staff, including chemists, biologists, inspectors, and facility support contractors. The Lab's closure and elimination of many positions, and the expertise they accompany, will create tremendous turnover. Houston, consequently, will lose critical access to test samples of air, water, and soil that require immediate analysis. This could require Houston to outsource its Lab work to entities outside of the federal government.

Federal government laboratories are impartial, apolitical, and non-profit entities. Numerous studies suggest inflated costs of government contractors in comparison to that of federal workers that perform the same work; contractors are typically paid nearly two or three times more than federal workers. A government contractor's allegiance is to their employer and shareholders. EPA

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lab employees are dedicated public servants committed to the Agency's mission of protecting public health and the environment. Government contractors who collect data will not necessarily be impartial, which may cause their findings to be less accurate and effective.

For these reasons, we ask that you reconsider the Houston Lab closure as well as the relocation of the facility and its employees to Ada, Oklahoma.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Al Green
Member of Congress

Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress