Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 5, 2020

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

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

We write to support the continued operation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 1 New England Regional Laboratory (NERL) in Chelmsford, Massachusetts and urge an extension of the existing lease. This laboratory offers rapid emergency response and advanced laboratory services to New England states, protecting public health and ecosystems throughout the region. It ensures that New England residents have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, monitoring 12,500 environmental samples a year at no cost to states. To shut down or relocate this important facility, as has been proposed in a 2015 EPA lab assessment, would jeopardize the health and safety of the communities it currently serves.[1]

NERL's central location in Chelmsford enables it to respond rapidly and effectively to crises, as its mobile labs can reach almost any location in the region within five hours. The additional testing and cleanup capabilities offered by NERL and its chemical accident prevention team have been vital in supplementing the efforts of state and local responders during chemical or biological emergencies.

For example, after a chemical plant explosion in Danvers, Massachusetts in 2006, NERL chemists analyzed air and water samples to assess the ongoing threat to communities. In the following months, NERL worked with state officials to ease public concerns and ensure a thorough cleanup. Similarly, in 2011, NERL stepped in to continue state air quality assessments after Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island lost lab capabilities during Tropical Storm Irene.

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[1] Smith Group, *Environmental Protection Agency Nationwide Laboratory Assessment*, Environmental Protection Agency (Feb. 2, 2015), https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-03/documents/environmental_protection_agency_nationwide_laboratory_assessment_report_of_findings.pdf at pp. 68-71

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In addition to providing critical assistance to state and local environmental programs during emergencies, NERL has spearheaded efforts to address emerging issues throughout New England such as toxic algal blooms and contamination from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The Region 1 lab is one of the few labs in the country that analyzes water for PFAS.

From monitoring the health of our beaches to cleaning up Superfund sites, NERL plays a critical role in protecting New England from chemical and biological hazards. This laboratory has provided important emergency response capabilities, field and laboratory studies, and technical expertise to New England states. Closing NERL would significantly disrupt current efforts to address dangerous environmental conditions and public health concerns, and would impose a financial burden on New England states to continue those efforts in NERL's absence. We urge EPA to protect the public health and environment in Massachusetts and across New England and maintain the NERL facility and workforce in Chelmsford.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Should you have any questions, please contact Hannah Vogel in Senator Markey's office at 202-224-2742.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress