

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As you prepare the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education & Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we are writing to urge you to provide at least \$2 million in funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) mobile testing units, which offer confidential health screenings to coal miners as part of the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program (CWHSP).

NIOSH mobile testing units offer confidential and accessible screenings that improve public health by providing early detection of coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP), commonly referred to as black lung disease. Unfortunately, there are only two NIOSH Mobile Testing Units in the Appalachian region. One of these units is not currently operating and one unit is expected to be defunct within a couple of years.

Black lung disease is a debilitating, potentially fatal disease caused by long-term exposure to coal dust. Recently, researchers have documented a rise in the advanced state of black lung disease, known as complicated black lung or progressive massive fibrosis. Complicated black lung encompasses the worst stages of the disease, which causes miners to gradually lose their ability to breathe. If black lung is caught early, steps can be taken to help prevent it from progressing to the most serious forms of the disease. The screenings offered through NIOSH Mobile Testing Units typically take 30 minutes and the results are confidential by law. The accessibility of the mobile units enable and potentially motivate action towards reducing miners' exposure to coal dust if testing positive for black lung.

In June 2019, your committee was sent a report prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) detailing that only about 35% of active coal miners participate in the CWHSP program because of several concerns. These concerns included:

1. Lack of confidentiality and fear of discrimination resulting from participation, and
2. Costly travel expenses and using limited time off to access screenings at black lung clinics.

The NIOSH-operated Mobile Testing Units travel to convenient community locations, easing time and accessibility concerns. Additionally, screenings through mobile units are sometimes offered through third party locations, possibly reducing miners' fear of discrimination.

To improve public health and increase participation in CWHSP screenings, we are asking the committee to provide \$2 million dollars for a new NIOSH Mobile Testing Unit and needed maintenance on existing units. Thank you for your consideration of our request. Should you have any questions for need additional information please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator