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Congress of the United States
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND CONSUMER
POLICY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

October 20, 2022

Secretary Jennifer Granholm
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave. SW
Washington DC 20585

Lieutenant General Scott A. Spellmon
Commanding General
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314

Dear Secretary Granholm and Lieutenant General Spellmon,

I am writing to you with urgency and deep concern about a rapidly developing situation in Missouri's First District. As you have likely seen, a recent independent report from Boston Chemical Data Corp has found traces of radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project in and around Jana Elementary School in the Hazelwood School District, a school with a Black student population of about 80 percent.¹ As a lifelong resident of St. Louis, I have been actively working to improve safety in this area for years and as a parent and Congresswoman I am extremely concerned about the health and safety of our children, parents, educators, administrators, and community members as a result of exposure to this waste your agencies both created and are responsible for cleaning up.

I am requesting a public briefing for community members from the Department of Energy and Army Corps of Engineers before the end of this week, and information on actions that will be taken to immediately remediate contamination within Jana Elementary. Our St. Louis community is in urgent need of clarification on what steps your agencies are taking to remediate the concerns from this recent report. We need to see swift action to ensure that we minimize disruptions to the lives of our children and families. Parents deserve to have free and accessible information about any potential health hazards to their children; yet, we have been hearing accounts that prior to the publication of this report, families were told they would need to pay hundreds of dollars for information on potential health hazards to their children's lives.

¹ NBC News. Missouri elementary school where radioactive waste was found will switch to virtual instruction. October 19, 2022.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/missouri-elementary-school-radioactive-waste-was-found-will-switch-vir-rcna52881>

Yesterday, at a school board meeting, it was announced that Jana Elementary will be taking the extraordinary step to close and move students to virtual learning with the goal of redistricting them altogether to other schools next semester. It is absolutely imperative that our students are not spending time within a school with radioactive waste. I have deep concerns about how this process could exacerbate education inequities and already pressing racial, economic, and environmental injustices across St. Louis. While virtual learning environments are far from ideal, the school's closure is crucial. Moreover, its immediate clean up must be prioritized and the impact on students and the integrity of their learning environments must be minimized.

The Army Corps of Engineers' 2019 study of the school which found hazardous waste nearby is only public because of a Freedom of Information Act request by residents - this lack of transparency has further broken down trust between your agencies and our community members. This is completely unacceptable and delays to clean up radioactive waste in our community are not only unconscionable but also potentially debilitating and deadly.

The 10-year floodplain tested by agencies so far is entirely insufficient and the recent 100 and 1,000 year floods have further shown the need for more testing. We need answers, not excuses, about the efforts your agencies are taking to immediately clean up radioactive, cancer-causing, hazardous waste. The health and safety of our children, educators, and community members must be a top priority.

I urge you to get back to my office and our St. Louis County community, no later than Friday, October 21, 2022, regarding next steps and actions to ensure the full health and safety of our St. Louis community. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cori Bush". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CORI BUSH
Member of Congress