

11.28 Mitigating the Health Effects of Climate Change

Resolution passed 2018; amended 2020

Whereas, a primary focus of PTA is the health and well-being of every child; and

Whereas, Washington State PTA has resolutions addressing the causes of and reducing the effects of external pollutants for asthma, health care for all children and youth, mitigating environmental hazards, and increasing access to mental health; and legislative principles that support increased access to health care for children and youth, mental health parity, school nutrition, and effective prevention and intervention programs; and

Whereas, multiple national and international agencies have published scientific research on adverse health effects of climate change on children (dehydration; heat exhaustion, cramps or stroke; trauma from extreme weather like floods, fire or storms; increased lung disease and illness from infectious diseases; malnutrition), including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), and the U.S. Global Change Research Program; and

Whereas, NIH research shows that climate change increases airborne allergens and pollution; affects the ecology and temperature of a region, resulting in increased disease vectors such as mosquitoes, ticks, and flies; may be associated with staple food shortages, malnutrition, and food contamination; affects changes in coastal ecosystem health that could increase the incidence of water contamination with harmful pathogens and chemicals; and

Whereas, the NIEHS reports that, "strategies for mitigating and adapting to climate change can prevent illness and death in people now, while also protecting the environment and health of future generations;" and

Whereas, the WHO reports that, "Today, humankind's activities are altering the world's climate. We are increasing the atmospheric concentration of energy-trapping gases, thereby amplifying the natural 'greenhouse effect' that makes the Earth habitable. These greenhouse gases (GHGs) comprise, principally, carbon dioxide (mostly from fossil fuel combustion and forest burning), plus other heat-trapping gases such as methane (from irrigated agriculture, animal husbandry, and oil extraction), nitrous oxide and various human-made halocarbons;" and

Whereas, the WHO concludes that, "Unprecedentedly, today the world population is encountering unfamiliar human-induced changes in the lower and middle atmospheres and world-wide depletion of various other natural systems (e.g., soil fertility, aquifers, ocean fisheries, and biodiversity in general). Beyond the early recognition that such changes would affect economic activities, infrastructure, and managed ecosystems, there is now recognition that global climate change poses risks to human population health"; and

Whereas, the global urgency to address climate change increased when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that at the current rate of warming, the global warming will reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052, that any risks due to climate change will increase further with a 2°C change, and that the national mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement won't limit global warming to 1.5°C; and

Whereas, uncoordinated and incomprehensive government actions in Washington state addressed greenhouse gas emissions (GHGE) and climate change, with the state of Washington enacting legislation to reduce anthropogenic (manmade) GHGE specifically for state agencies to 95% below 1990 levels and achieve net zero GHGE, and the King County Council, updated its Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) for cities to voluntarily adapt and reduce regional GHGE and prepare for climate change impacts, especially in communities severely impacted by climate change; and

Whereas, National PTA has had a position statement on Environmental Health, Remediation, Sustainability and Climate Change since 2003, recognizing “the scientific consensus surrounding climate change and the impact of human activities. Children represent a particularly vulnerable group already suffering disproportionately from both direct and indirect adverse health effects of anthropogenic global warming” and that “PTA members have a responsibility to promote environmental health and safety, and to help protect our world’s finite natural resources.”

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils urge national, state and local policymakers to acknowledge that climate change is a health crisis that disproportionately and adversely impacts children and youth, and to adopt and enforce legislation that enables people to adapt to climate change and mitigates the effects of climate change, and that uses market forces, incentives, and regulations to sequester carbon and reduce emissions of CO₂ and GHGs with the goal of slowing, halting, and reversing climate change; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA encourages and calls for members, policymakers in government, inter-governmental bodies and non-governmental, school and community organizations to raise awareness and advocate for increased research to reduce and mitigate adverse health effects resulting from climate change; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA promotes utilization of the existing K-12 Integrated Environmental and Sustainability Education Learning Standards, including educating students on climate and energy literacy and human sustainability; and educates its members on how to calculate their carbon footprint, ways they can reduce their carbon footprint, such as green and clean energy changes they can make in their lives; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils urge policymakers to take action to make schools and communities more energy-efficient, including the use of renewable, sustainable energy and technologies, to provide funding and technical assistance to jurisdictions to develop, adopt and implement Strategic Climate Action Plans (SCAP) that focus on reducing school district, city, county and regional GHGE and prepare for climate change impacts, especially those communities severely impacted by climate change, and to enact environmentally healthy land-use policies that take into account the geographic, economic, ethnic, cultural, and other societal factors that influence the incidence, exposure, and effects of environmental health hazards.