

Legislative Summary for S.2506, the Healthy Places Act of 2006

Introduced by Senators Obama, Durbin, Clinton and Kerry, on April 4th, 2006, the bill includes the following major provisions.

Key Definitions

The bill defines Built Environment as all buildings, spaces, and products created or modified by people. It defines Health Impact Assessment as procedures, methods or tools used to analyze the effects of a policy or program on health.

Intergovernmental Working Group

The bill would create a new governmental body, led by the EPA and HHS to serve a leadership and management role at the federal level. It would be responsible for facilitating discussion around built environment and health, setting a research agenda, and implementing organizational, programmatic and policy changes within federal government to improve environmental health.

Health Impacts Assessment (HIA)

The bill sets forth the institutionalization of HIA. It requires that CDC establish a health assessment program that takes the lead in writing guidance and awarding grants to state and local government for the practice of HIA. Any HIA written with these funds must be open to public comment and must respond to these comments. It must also be submitted to relevant federal agencies. This section establishes a database that will contain all HIAs completed, including all tools and guidance used, as a result of this grant program.

Environmental Health Improvement Grants

The bill provides a source of funding for state and local community organizations to mitigate environmental health threats, especially where the community bears a disproportionate burden of disease. It provides seed funding to establish multi-stakeholder councils who bear responsibility for conducting a health impact assessment in their community. It also provides funding to pre-existing councils to support their environmental health improvement activities. Total authorized funding for this section is \$25 million in 2007 and additional sums through 2011.

Built Environment and Health Research

The bill provides funds to research institutions to further study the relationship between built environment and health of individuals and populations. Specific areas of focus should include causal relationships as well as measures to evaluate health status and progress. Other areas of focus include intervention strategies, personal preference, and impact on disadvantaged communities. This section prioritizes interdisciplinary research.