

Draft AAS Position Statement

The American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS) is an organization that elevates the standards, improves the practice, advances the professional proficiency, and promotes the highest levels of ethical conduct among professional sanitarians in every field of environmental health. The vision and mission of the AAS has always focused on promoting the core practice and science of public/environmental health. Protecting communities from this current COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest public health challenges in modern times, a challenge that continues to be addressed by a professional, dedicated workforce.

Public and environmental health professionals have been working around the clock on the front lines of the pandemic for nearly 2 years, helping to keep communities safe from COVID-19. Despite their ongoing and dedicated efforts in this regard, nearly a quarter of public and environmental health workers report feeling bullied, harassed, or threatened due to their work as the pandemic continues, with 1 in 8 saying they had received job-related threats. [khn.org]

At least 181 state and local public health leaders in 38 states have resigned, retired, or been fired since April 2020, the largest exodus of leaders in the history of public health. [chcf.org] Nationwide, state and local public and environmental health professionals are on the receiving end of threatening and harassing conduct for fulfilling their duty to protect the public's health [networkforphl.org]

State, local, and federal officials making determinations to contain COVID-19 must remember the knowledge, wisdom, and insights that the medical, scientific, public, and environmental health community has provided during this pandemic. [neha.org] Even those with policy disagreements should call for respect and appreciation for public health officials, who are acting in good faith. In some contexts, only health officers have authority to enter public health orders; their actions are not a subversion of democratic process, but its prescribed expression. [JAMA]

Without a doubt, standing one's ground in public health principles, and continuing to uphold the science of prevention should be applauded. No one in public/environmental health should be at risk of physical or moral injury to oneself and one's family. This abuse is certainly a situation that everyone with a voice should condemn. Those working in environmental and public health are dedicated professionals, and should not be subject to threatening, harassing, or intimidating behavior as they perform their official protective duties.

The American Academy of Sanitarians takes the position our nation needs strong public and environmental health leadership to address current and future threats to the health of our communities. AAS takes a firm stand to support the core principles of public health, and the dedicated professionals who are working to shepherd us all through the trajectory of this disease, and strongly emphasizes that harassment of public health officials must stop; instead, all efforts and attacks should be directed against the virus to take our communities, the nation and the world beyond this pandemic.

As the public and environmental health community continues in its mission to prevent disease and death, we support them, and thank them for their tireless dedication and perseverance.

Position statement adopted by the American Academy of Sanitarians Board of Directors on [DATE].

Resources:

[Attacks on Public Health Officials During COVID-19 | Public Health | JAMA | JAMA Network](#)

[Public Health Under Threat: An Examination of State Laws Protecting Public Health Officials from Harassment - Network for Public Health Law \(networkforphl.org\)](#)

[Effects of Threats, Harassment Directed at Public Health Officials May Outlast Pandemic - California Health Care Foundation \(chcf.org\)](#)

[Insults, Threats of Violence Still Imperil Public Health Leaders | MedPage Today](#)

[Public Health Officials Face Wave Of Threats, Pressure Amid Coronavirus Response | Kaiser Health News \(khn.org\)](#)

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