The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the United States House of Representatives  
H 222, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515  

The Honorable Steny Hoyer  
House Majority Leader  
H-148, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515  

Re: Urge Passage of the Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act (H.R. 1603)  

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Hoyer:

We are scientists who have devoted our careers as researchers, teachers and government officials to combating the public health threat of asbestos. Asbestos causes numerous deadly diseases, including mesothelioma, lung cancer, asbestosis, and ovarian cancer. While asbestos use has declined since its height in 1973, the death toll from asbestos exposure remains alarmingly high, totaling nearly 40,000 Americans every year.

Because there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos, we and many of our colleagues have long recognized that the public will not be protected unless we ban all asbestos mining, importation and use. Nearly 70 countries around the world have already taken this step but the US has lagged behind. However, H.R. 1603, the Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act (ARBAN), provides Congress with a unique opportunity to eliminate asbestos from US commerce.

In addition to banning the importation and use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products within one year of enactment, we strongly support the transition plan for the fifteen chlor-alkali plants that now use asbestos diaphragms. Under this plan, these plants will stop importing asbestos in five years and convert to non-asbestos technology within 10 years of enactment. A new Right-to-Know program would also require all importers and users of asbestos and asbestos-containing products during the last three years to inform both the EPA and the public of their activities, including where and how much asbestos has been used and how many people have been exposed. Finally, the National Academy of Sciences would conduct a comprehensive study of risks presented by “legacy” asbestos often used in building construction decades ago that is still present in millions of residences, businesses, factories, public buildings, and schools across the country. This information will be used to recommend new, stronger policies to protect workers and the public from unsafe exposures.

While recognizing that scientific understanding of the mineral composition and health effects of asbestos and asbestos-like fibers is evolving and may warrant a broader definition in the future, we believe the current definition will achieve the public health benefits of the bill. We support the efforts of government scientists to improve the definition of asbestos in order to inform future legislative and regulatory actions.
We urge you to bring H.R. 1603, a strong bill to protect public health, to the House floor as soon as possible with the goal of passing ARBAN on a bi-partisan basis and sending it to the Senate. Thank you again for your strong support for this landmark legislation.

Sincerely,

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Brad Black MD, Medical Director, Center for Asbestos Related Disease, Libby, MT

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Richard Clapp, MPH, DSc, Professor Emeritus, Boston University School of Public Health

Devra Davis, PhD, MPH, fellow American College of Epidemiology, visiting professor of medicine that Hebrew University, and President Environmental Health Trust

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cc: Rep. Frank Pallone
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici
Rep. Greg Walden
Rep. Paul Tonko
Rep. John Shimkus
Rep. Elissa Slotkin
Sen. Jeff Merkley