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Michèle Solá, Director

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Congresswoman Maloney
1651 3rd Avenue Suite 311
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Dear Congresswoman Maloney:

Manhattan Country School (MCS) in New York City is a school built on the belief that everyone should have a voice. In September, we decided that our yearly activism project should address Mountain Top Removal, a destructive type of coal mining. We all believed that this was a topic that was not only addressing an environmental issue, but an issue of civil rights.

We all realized that the people in coal mining areas of our country's southern mountains were being exploited. Their communities and environments that they live in were getting destroyed. This was all happening because of our need for cheap energy.

The 7th and 8th graders at MCS made a goal to go to West Virginia, and get a more personal view of what was happening in our country's coal fields. We needed to raise 30,000 dollars to reach our goal. We did this through a movie showing, a folk music event, and donations from friends and family. On May 23rd, we traveled ten hours to get to West Virginia to further educate ourselves about what we had been hearing about in our classes that addressed MTR. We met activists like Judy Bonds and Larry Gibson, who told us about their experiences living in Appalachia. We heard about their objections to coal and MTR, and what their goals were. We learned how we could be better student activists, and how affective it was to let people know what we are thinking.

We, as 7th and 8th grade activists, are passionate about the work we have been doing for the past nine months. We believe that we should all have rights to a healthy life and environment.

In Appalachia, the coal industries are using heavy explosives to blast off the tops of mountains in order to retrieve the coal buried within them to power America's electrical appliances. This process of coal mining is called Mountaintop Removal, and it is the most efficient and most destructive form of coalmining there is.

Mountaintop Removal can turn the pure waters of Appalachia into poison. When the coal is extracted, the waste is shoved over the side, into the streams and the valleys. The solids block off the flow of the streams while the coal dust poisons the water. Most humans can only live up

to three days without water. Just a few days ago, we saw a Mountaintop Removal coal-mining site. When we were there, we felt faint and short of breath. The entire mountain had disappeared. We thought to ourselves, “This used to be a whole Appalachian mountain. Now it’s just a flat rock plain. Where did the mountain go?” Now we know what happened. The mountain was pushed down into the creeks. Not *into* the creek though, but rather *onto* the creek, buried the creek and poisoned water that was perfectly pure.

All the water on earth is connected. These creeks lost under the rubble are linked to small rivers, which are linked to bigger rivers, which are linked to the Gulf. If one is poisoned or blocked, all the rest are also poisoned. An environmental scientist, Doctor Margaret Palmer recently called the headwater streams in our mountains the capillaries of the water bodies. If the circulation is killed on one, that part of the body dies.

We have shown how coal can harm the environment and water from above the ground. Unfortunately, coal can also pollute water from underneath the ground too. In Prenter, West Virginia, coal companies in the late 80’s injected coal slurry into abandoned underground mines. Coal slurry, or coal sludge, is what comes off of coal when it is processed and is either put into a huge dam or injected underground. The toxic sludge then leaches into the water table and poisons whole communities. Coal slurry is very unhealthy containing large quantities of Mercury, lead, and arsenic plus the chemicals that were used to wash the coal. The Mercury in the coal sludge has been know to create birth defects in newborn children. Coal sludge also contains Hydrogen Sulfide gas in which there was an average of 30 parts per million per household. At 1 part per million water starts to smell like rotten eggs and 15 parts per million is the legal evacuation level. Because of the water pollution people in Prenter have to import their water, which is another fee added to the already failing economy. Just recently we spoke with the mom who’s son attended to the same school as a boy named Josh McCormick. Josh McCormick died at the age of twenty-two of liver disease. Not only does the water at Prenter poison people, it is also a fire hazard. Some people in communities with contaminated water can actually light their water on fire.

**Adults always tell us to clean our rooms.
What about their own mess?
What about the mess that they’ve left for us in the world?**

For decades, coal has been dirtying our world. Pollution of water has been coming from top and bottom. Rubble and dust have eventually gone into water after mountains have been destroyed, where the water is no longer drinkable or usable. Coal slurry is also often injected down into abandoned underground mines, where it leaks into water wells that are used day-to-day.

Any time we flick on a light switch, a mountain is destroyed, and water is polluted.

When you walk down Times Square, what do you think about?

Now after being in West Virginia, we think differently.

When we see the wonderful lights over Times Square, we think about the black sludgy water we encountered in Whitesville, West Virginia.

When we see an iPod charging, we think about the families in Prenter, WV, who are forced use their tap water even though of the disgusting injections of coal slurry into the ground have ruined it.

Do you think about the same things as us?

We are truly appreciative that you have decided to sponsor the Clean Water Protection Act, but we have another request for you. We want you to take a serious leadership role in this act. We want this mess to be cleaned up, and we can not do this without your help.

The Clean Water Protection Act protects lives of people living in Appalachia by guaranteeing them safe water for drinking and using.

If you take leadership, the mess that the adults have left us will begin to be cleaned up.

If you take leadership, our future will no longer to be feared but embraced. We will be able to live a healthy and clean life, just because we have safe water to use.

It is up to you to take the first steps to clean up this mess.

Thank you so much for already signing on to sponsor the Clean Water Protection Act

Sincerely,
Kira Felsenfeld
Quitze Eguigure
Isaac Burg
7th Grade Students
Manhattan Country School