

September 12, 2012

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Jerry McNerney (D-Stockton) today introduced the Air and Health Quality Empowerment Zone Designation Act, H.R. 6378, to address the poor air quality in San Joaquin Valley. Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) is an original cosponsor of the bill.

“Here in the San Joaquin Valley, we have higher childhood asthma rates than other areas in California and around the country. Not only must we do something to address this critical public health issue, we need to work to mitigate the burden of the cost such health crises place on our community. Our kids deserve to be healthy, attending school, and living in a clean environment, and my bill will help to achieve this goal,” said Rep. Jerry McNerney. “I am pleased to be joined by my Valley colleague, Representative Costa, in working to improve our air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.”

The Air and Health Quality Empowerment Zone Designation Act targets areas with poor air quality and above average child asthma rates. Areas meeting these criteria could voluntarily request to be designated as empowerment zones eligible to receive federal grant funding. In exchange for federal support, pollution control districts in these areas are charged with developing and implementing plans to improve air quality and public health in the zone.

“Improving the lives and health of our children in the San Joaquin Valley requires that we continue to address our air quality,” said Rep. Jim Costa. “From creating the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District over 20 years ago to cosponsoring this legislation with Rep. McNerney today, I have long been a strong advocate for policies to enhance our air. We have made great progress, but especially as Valley kids go back to school it is obvious that we still have more work to do. Though there is no silver bullet to fix our air, this legislation gives us another tool to make our skies clearer.”

To be eligible, the area must meet specified national ambient air quality standards for ozone, have particular emission levels from agricultural sources, meet or exceed national asthma rates, and suffer from high unemployment rates. Recipients will match federal investment dollar for dollar. California’s San Joaquin Valley fails to meet national air quality standards.

California’s San Joaquin Valley, which includes Kern, San Joaquin, Fresno, Stanislaus, Madera, King, Merced, and Tulare Counties, suffers from some of the worst air quality in both the state and Nation. Valley children miss hundreds of thousands days of school each year, and one in five children living in the Valley has asthma. Illnesses related to poor air quality cost the Valley approximately \$3 billion annually.