



Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform

Dear Chairman Schatz and members of Special Committee on the Climate Crisis,

My name is Michele Roberts. I am the National Co-Coordinator of the Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform (EJHA). EJHA is a national collective of grassroots Environmental Justice groups located around the United States. Along with our partners, we support a diverse movement towards safe chemicals and clean energy that leaves no community or worker behind. I offer these comments on behalf of EJHA and our affiliates. We appreciate the opportunity to share with you today.

First off, we want to put it on the record that Climate Justice is Environmental Justice and Environmental Justice is Climate Justice. Climate and Economic Justice issues are not separate and distinct from Environmental Justice.

Comprehensive climate or EJ legislation must ensure that climate change is mitigated to the greatest extent possible and that the unavoidable impacts are addressed justly. This means acknowledging that while everyone will be impacted by climate change, the impacts are not spread around equally; very often the communities that are hit first and worst by climate impacts are the same ones that have contributed least to causing it.

Climate is a “risk multiplier”. EJ communities are disproportionately impacted by the cumulative impacts of multiple sources of pollution, climate impacts, and social vulnerabilities like racism and poverty. Our EJ communities are frequently located in low-lying areas or places that are otherwise particularly vulnerable to extreme weather. Take Houston, TX. When Hurricane Harvey hit residents not only faced the direct devastation from flooding, but unpermitted toxic releases and incidents at multiple petrochemical facilities on top. Climate change presents additional and unique challenges to communities that are already overburdened and impacted by cumulative impacts.

The Southbridge Community in Wilmington, Delaware is one example of a community dealing with the cumulative impacts of climate-induced flooding, air pollution, legacy contamination, substandard housing conditions, institutionalized racism and historic political disinvestment¹. The historic community of Mossville, LA founded by formerly enslaved people, is another. Mossville residents are surrounded by over a dozen high risk facilities and are at a disproportionate risk from extreme weather events like hurricanes.

Equitable and just climate policies must address cumulative impacts. Communities do not get to process different kinds of pollution in silos in their bodies or deal with the impacts of climate change separate from the rest of their lived experiences; Therefore, it is imperative that we put an end to regulating and legislating in silos. Policies that fail to account for real-world experiences and institutionalized injustices such “cap and trade” or “cap and dividend”, which do not guarantee emissions reductions in EJ communities, should be avoided.

¹ See *Environmental Justice for Delaware* for more information. <https://www.ucsusa.org/EJdelaware>

Thankfully Congress does not need to “reinvent the wheel” when it comes to cumulative impacts. EJ Communities have solutions. While no policy implemented to date has been perfect, there is important progress happening at the local level in New Jersey, Kentucky, Minnesota, Delaware, California among others. There is also strong language on cumulative impacts in Senator Booker’s *Environmental Justice Act of 2019*², which EJ advocates contributed to significantly.

At the demand of local residents, Louisville, KY has made huge strides in reducing toxic air pollution in EJ communities through the collaborative development and implementation of the STAR (Strategic Toxic Air Reduction) Program. Since first implementing the program in 2005, local emissions of toxic air pollution have dropped by 68%.³

With that said, what do we need from our policymakers?

Recognize that communities are not starting out on equal footing and legislate accordingly. Policies that focus on “equality” or “fairness” in future decision-making are insufficient to protect EJ communities. Policies must strive for **justice**, not equality and should address cumulative impacts directly. Justice means that past harms must be addressed and communities’ local environments and health must be restored, or at a minimum compensated for. Justice is not “one size fits all”. The solutions will look different in different communities—and should be driven by individual community residents, but climate legislation should provide a base requirement for legacy contamination and damages to be addressed.

Read and support the Equitable & Just Climate Platform⁴. The Platform has been endorsed by over 200 organizations from big green groups to grassroots community groups and many more. The Platform is meant to be a guide for what equitable and just climate policy should include.

In particular, just climate legislation must ensure:

- 1) to address the legacy of compounding social, racial, economic and environmental injustices an integral part of the solution;
- 2) the communities with the least resources to respond to the climate crisis are prioritized for public support for adaptation, mitigation and, when required, just relocation;
- 3) individual and community rights to self-determination are respected and communities are able to participate in forming their own solutions;
- 4) we make a **just** transition away from fossil fuels, ensuring that workers are offered the necessary resources and training to continue to provide for their families and transition into new fields that pay as well or better than their old jobs and maintain the right to collectively bargain.

² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/2236/text>

³ <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/air-pollution-control-district/strategic-toxic-air-reduction-program>

⁴ <https://ajustclimate.org>

