

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

**Hearing on July 15, 2021
“Advancing Environmental Justice Through Climate Action”**

Questions for the Record

**Catherine Coleman Flowers
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The Honorable Kathy Castor

- 1. Ms. Flowers, the impacts of the climate crisis are not distributed equitably, and we see many ways that climate impacts, from worsening heatwaves to floods, hurt low-income households and communities of color first and worst. What steps should Congress take to accelerate and ensure disaster recovery reaches low-income and rural communities following disasters?**

According to a 2009 University of California report, floods, air pollution and extreme heat are among the climate events that result in higher death for African American and low-income individuals. This study also cited the economic factors as determinants in this uneven distribution. In my view, systemic racism is also a factor.

A recent Washington Post article stated: A growing body of research shows that FEMA (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/05/climate/FEMA-disaster-money-climate.html>), the government agency responsible for helping Americans recover from disasters, often helps white disaster (<https://www.nytimes.com/article/tropical-storm-danny-hurricane.html>) victims more than people of color, even when the amount of damage is the same. Not only do individual white Americans often receive more aid from FEMA; so, do the communities in which they live, according to several recent studies based on federal data.

How do we change this? First, Congress should accelerate disaster recovery in low-income or BIPOC communities by making sure that the current formulas for provide for equitable distribution of disaster relief. Regulations should allow for recovery aid to families living on heir’s property especially in rural communities. Scorecards should be made public to show who received aid, how much and where it was distributed. Also supporting the guidance offered in Justice 40 will also a roadmap for equitable recovery.

<https://data.globalchange.gov/report/uca-climategap-2009>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/07/11/fema-black-owned-property/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/climate/FEMA-race-climate.html>

- 2. Ms. Flowers, in your written testimony, you note that climate-fueled extreme weather events may exacerbate existing risks to frontline communities living near industrial and chemical facilities along the Mississippi River. What are the existing risks to these communities, how could climate change make things worse, and what should Congress do to help frontline communities?**

In accessing some of the risks to these communities and how climate change makes things worse, I will reference a 2016 EPA publication entitled, What Climate Change Means for Mississippi. “Coastal homes and infrastructure will flood more often as sea level rises because storm surges will become higher as well. Rising sea level is likely to increase flood insurance rates, while more frequent storms could increase the deductible for wind damage in homeowner insurance policies. Many cities, roads, railways, ports, airports, and oil and gas facilities along the Gulf Coast are vulnerable to the combined impacts of storms and sea level rise. People may move from vulnerable coastal communities and stress the infrastructure of the communities that receive them.” Testimony from others have already indicated the impacts seen in places like Mississippi, but all along the Mississippi especially in Cancer Alley.

The Justice40 Initiative is a significant part of that commitment. For the first time in our nation’s history, the Federal government has made it a goal that at least 40-percent of climate and clean energy investment benefits flow to disadvantaged communities. The Justice40 Initiative has the potential to deliver tangible, positive benefits to disadvantaged communities across the country; by investing in legacy pollution cleanup, clean energy and transportation, quality housing, and more, the Biden administration will help begin to address our nation’s legacy of injustice. This will be strengthened by Congressional action.

Congress should pass the infrastructure plan and reconciliation package to provide good paying union jobs, as well as addressing overburden and underserved communities that are greatly impacted by climate change.

<https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-09/documents/climate-change-ms.pdf>

- 3. Ms. Flowers, in your testimony, you referenced the pollution burden on environmental justice communities in St. James Parish and St. John the Baptist Parish in Louisiana. In March 2021, United Nations human rights experts condemned environmental racism in this area. Could you please describe the kinds of health, environmental, and socio-economic challenges these environmental justice communities are experiencing? How can Congress help these communities? Please feel free to supplement your response with any statements from environmental justice leaders and studies documenting ongoing health, environmental, and socio-economic challenges.**

The best way for me to respond to this question is to enter into the record the following: Letter to President Biden from Sharon Lavigne, President, RISE St. James

<https://labucketbrigade.org/letter-from-sharon-lavigne-to-pres-biden-on-cancer-alley-formosa-plastics/>

Letter to Michael Regan, EPA Administrator: RE: Urge Consideration of Escalating Hazards to Chemical and Industrial Facilities Due to Climate-Fueled Extreme Events, Particularly on Environmental Justice Communities

<https://cpr-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/house-select-cmte-climate-crisis-ltr-epa-rmp-rule-improvements-072921.pdf>

Finally, I am also including a recent study from Tulane University:

<https://law.tulane.edu/sites/law.tulane.edu/files/u1286/LTR%20Cancer%20Rates%20v%20Pollution-Related%20Risk%202021-6-21%20rev.%202021-6-23.pdf>.

Congress can help these communities by providing funding for the communities to do the type of air quality monitoring needed to hold the manufacturers accountable; enacting or enforcing laws that will protect these communities now, and climate action because the emissions from these industrial sources are creating the climate catastrophes that are impacting all of us and generations to come.