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Testimony of Mr. Richard Moore
To the House Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearing on
“Building Back with Justice: Environmental Justice Is Central to the American Jobs Plan”
July 21, 2021

Thank you Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer and the rest of the members of the Committee for this invitation to give testimony before you today on the Justice40 initiative and building back better with environmental justice.

I am happy to offer this testimony on behalf of the Los Jardines Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Environmental Justice Health Alliance, based on my decades of expertise cultivated as a leader in the environmental justice movement.

I want to start by thanking the members of the committee for focusing today’s hearing on environmental justice. More than ever before, the Biden administration has put environmental justice on the national agenda. In January, President Biden outlined plans for the Justice40 Initiative, which would direct 40 percent of the benefits of a sustainable economy to marginalized communities such as the ones we work with in Albuquerque, N.M. I hope with my testimony today I am able to convey to you why the equitable implementation of the Justice 40 initiative is essential to truly building back better.

Why is the Justice 40 initiative so crucial?

Communities of color, low income communities, Tribal communities and rural communities across the United States experience disproportionate harm from environmental contaminants and face disproportionate risks from climate change.

In South Valley, Albuquerque, we have been fighting against the cumulative burdens of pollution and social inequality for over five decades now. South Valley is home to a thriving Chicano and immigrant community rooted in rich cultural traditions and agricultural history. However, our community has been subjected to the structural forces of environmental racism that has left a legacy of contaminated groundwater, two Superfund sites and high levels of toxic air pollution. Our drinking water supply has been consistently plagued by radon and arsenic contamination. We are surrounded by rail yards, industrial facilities and home to the City’s only landfill, contributing to high levels of toxic air pollutants. With unsafe water, unclean air and inadequate access to health care, the community deals with compounding health risks which we only saw exacerbated through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, South Valley is not unique. There are many working class communities of color across the nation that are the dumping grounds for toxic chemicals others don’t want in their backyards. Environmental justice communities bear a disproportionately large share of the burden--to our health, jobs and livelihood--and get few of the benefits of living near industrial facilities and waste disposal plants. Too often, environmental stressors occur simultaneously with

high unemployment rates, and a lack of access to health care, education, infrastructure such as roads, street lighting, green spaces, and other socioeconomic stressors.

Environmental laws are sometimes inconsistently applied and are often more slowly enforced in our communities. The government offers few protections and in some cases reinforces these inequalities. Historically, the Federal Government, through public policy choices such as residential segregation, has taken actions that have perpetuated, institutionalized, or defended injustices that has resulted in inequality in exposure to hazardous substances and unequal access to clean water, clean air, healthy food, safe housing, transportation, and other environmental benefits.

In order to address harms arising from environmental racism and to build a future in which we all have access to a safe and healthy environment, the government must affirmatively deliver benefits of infrastructure investments to environmental justice communities.

Critical investments for environmental justice communities

We were pleased to see critical investments to fund environmental justice grants, air monitoring grants, federally-qualified health centers and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program included in the American Rescue Plan. We were also pleased to see a focus on environmental justice and building healthy, safe, and equitable communities in the American Jobs Plan (AJP). Congress must ensure that at least 40% of the federal investments included in future infrastructure legislation are for programs that can deliver real benefits to the communities that need them the most.

- To ensure Justice 40 framework is utilized in legislation:
 - Congress must ensure that at least 40% of the federal investments included in infrastructure legislation and the federal budget are for programs that can deliver real benefits to the communities that need them the most. Examples of existing programs include, Low-Income Household Drinking Water and Wastewater Emergency Assistance Program; National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) Environmental Career Worker Training; EPA Environmental Justice Small Grants (EJSG) Program. A more comprehensive list of programs is provided [here](#).
 - Congress must also work towards improving existing federal programs and creating new programs that deliver benefits to environmental justice communities.
 - New programs should clean up legacy pollution and create greater access to renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean transportation, affordable housing, flood and heat protections, and other projects that benefit environmental justice communities.
 - The federal government should directly fund creative pilot projects which focus on direct employment and job training in emerging sectors and environmentally sustainable industries.

(OMB) should be provided with enough resources to build a monitoring process and clearly track gaps in federal investments that need to be filled to meet the Justice 40 goal.

Lastly I would urge respected members of this committee to look towards building comprehensive legislation such as the Environmental Justice For All Act that deals with many of the challenges environmental justice communities face.

Thank you, again, for inviting me to testify to the committee. Congress and the administration have a rare opportunity to help our communities move beyond surviving, to actually thriving. Please don't let this moment pass by.