



February 14, 2022

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman:

On behalf of Our Future West Virginia (OFWV), I write to offer our strong support for the Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 2021). We are urging each committee member to quickly advance this important legislation as a way to appropriately address the long history of environmental racism and injustice, and the cumulative and disproportionate health and environmental impacts that have adversely affected communities of color, low-income communities, and Native/Indigenous nations and communities, across the country.

OFWV supports this critical piece of legislation as it aligns with our mission of helping communities in WV build local power to upend oppressive systems around them and working to ensure that every West Virginian has the justice, dignity, and equity needed to thrive.

Unfortunately, there are many communities in WV that have received short shrift when it comes to the notion of Environmental Justice, suffering in isolation and readily ignored by policy makers and toxic producing manufacturers. Despite decades of research and evidence, and the far-reaching testimonies from impacted people and communities themselves, there has been little if any redress. Instead, the documented history of the cumulative and disproportionate chemical hazards and impacts imposed on communities of color, low-income communities, and Native/Indigenous communities have continued for generations ad nauseam. Impacted folks have curated their own solutions to these injustices and harms for some time, while calls for official intervention at the local and state levels have gone ignored. The extensive public input process that informed the Act's creation reflects this history and stands as evidence. Further it has produced legislation that is uniquely influenced by the very folks it seeks to help.

OFWV strongly supports the Act's central elements, which are important steps toward remedying a long legacy of harm, and ensuring the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people - regardless of color, culture, national origin, income, or geographical location - with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of health and environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

These urgently needed policy improvements include:



- Requiring federal agencies to consider cumulative health impacts under the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act in making permitting decisions, and ensuring that permits are only issued when there is a reasonable certainty of no harm to human health;
- Providing \$75 million in annual grants for research and program development to reduce health disparities; and improve public health in environmental justice communities;
- Strengthening the Civil Rights Act to permit private citizens and organizations facing discrimination to seek legal remedies;
- Creating an energy transition economic development assistance fund – paid for through new fees on oil, gas and coal companies – to support communities and workers as they transition away from greenhouse gas-dependent economies;
- Strengthening the National Environmental Policy Act to ensure that communities have a meaningful opportunity to engage in NEPA processes that will impact them.

The Environmental Justice for All Act is a long overdue course correction to our nation's failed chemical management policies, and the cumulative hazards and disproportionate harms that have resulted for communities of color, low-income communities, and Native/Indigenous communities. We urge the Committee, and any other committees with jurisdiction over this legislation, to rectify these injustices and truly address this legacy of harm, by promptly passing the bill out of Committee and sending it on to the full House of Representatives.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kathy Ferguson

Kathy Ferguson
Interim Exec. Director, OFWV