



Friends Committee on  
National Legislation

A Quaker Lobby in the Public Interest

## Friends Committee on National Legislation Testimony for the Record to the House Natural Resources Committee regarding the Environmental Justice for All Act

**March 1, 2022**

Chair Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the Committee,

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) welcomes this opportunity to submit testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee in relation to its February 15, 2022, full Committee hearing on the Environmental Justice for All Act.

FCNL supports legislation to address longstanding environmental injustices in the United States, including the Environmental Justice for All Act of 2021. As a Quaker advocacy organization, FCNL works to advance legislation that support peace, justice, and environmental stewardship. Our vision for the world stems from the Quaker belief in the worth and dignity inherently present in each person.

As long-time advocates, we know that opportunities to pass transformational environmental legislation in the Congress are rare. Chair Grijalva, you and your colleagues are here at one of those rare opportunities. You can vote to pass legislation that extends justice to communities across the U.S. who have long sought relief from environmental racism.

The environmental challenges facing communities – low-income and minority communities – are, at heart, rooted a long history of policies that entrenched segregation, exacerbated economic inequality, and exposed them to multiple environmental hazards. The results of these policies can be seen in 2022 in communities like [St. James Parish](#), Louisiana, where residents of the Diamond neighborhood are subjected to poor air quality due to an industrial facility sited directly across the fence-line from people's homes.

In the past year, FCNL has been heartened to see initiatives by the Biden Administration to address this environmental crisis. The [Executive Order](#) on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, for example, established the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council and set out the goals of the [Justice40 Initiative](#). We are also grateful to the Congress for passing the Infrastructure Innovation and Jobs Act (IIJA) in November 2021. That bill contains significant funding to remove pollution from the water and soil, take down highways built through minority communities, and expand public transit options. These are moves in the right direction.

We believe, however, that more remains to be done. That is why FCNL supports the [Environmental Justice for All Act of 2021](#), introduced by Chair Grijalva and Representative McEachin. We see as key this legislation's provisions strengthening Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on disparate impact, or actions that appear neutral but have a lopsided impact on people of color. We

also support the Environmental Justice for All Act's requirement to consider cumulative impacts over time in permitting decisions under the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts. This will ensure that permits will not be issued if the project fails to show that it will not harm human health. These two provisions provide the legal foundations for a strong response to environmental injustice.

The Quaker civil rights and social justice leader Bayard Rustin said that "one has to fight for justice for all." The 117<sup>th</sup> Congress has a moral responsibility to lift the burden of injustice from the shoulders of the communities that have borne the overwhelming burden of pollution. We ask the Chair, members of the Committee, and the Congress to meet this moment, show that the Congress listens to the voices of the people, and pass the Environmental Justice for All Act.

#### **Addendum: Statements from FCNL's [Advocacy Corps](#) Members**

"Growing up in New Mexico, I have been familiar with adverse and harmful effects of pollution on our communities and ecosystems. My state has been fighting for years for federal water protections. We have a saying in New Mexico "El Aqua Es Vida," meaning water is life. Like the waterways we have in our state, our communities, families, and friends are all connected. Pollution affects all of us. I am asking that on behalf of your constituents, you protect the place you and they call home by supporting the Environmental Justice for All Act. I am asking for you to preserve the natural beauty of life and our experience with it."

—John Hoang, New Mexico\*

"I want to show people that their voices are loud, and that it's important to speak on issues that have affected one's own community. Passing the Environmental Justice for All Act is critical for more environmental legislation and climate change action to gain traction. Our environment has long outlived us, and urgent action must be taken soon to protect it."

— Taylor Powell-Abbinante, Ohio\*

"The current situation in Ukraine and the newly released United Nations Climate Report should serve to remind us how vulnerable we all are to the perils of wartime and climate change. Together we bear witness to our interdependency as the World unites to stand against the poison Putin is inflicting because know what happens in Ukraine doesn't necessarily stay in Ukraine. If any Democracy is threatened, all Democracy is threatened. The same holds true for our natural environment. If one community in our world is suffering the negative impacts of toxic waste or pollution, we will all have to face the consequences. We must unite to protect the planet and pass the Environmental Justice for All Act. If any one of us is not protected, none of us are protected."

— Marianne Wareham, Florida\*

\*Statement has been edited for clarity