



NAACP

Maryland
STATE CONFERENCE

March 11, 2022

Committee | Appropriations

HB 1033 | Environment and Energy – Investment in Overburdened Communities

Position | Favorable

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

Justice 40 represents the greatest opportunity for Maryland to begin to restore the damage done by political and governmental indifference and structurally racist environmental practices perpetrated against BIPOC communities over the last century. It is the first proactive effort that ensures benefit to communities devastated by cumulative environmental impacts compounded by climate change.

Our exposure to a polluted environment will only increase and the risk to future generations will become more severe. Children born in 2021 will live through seven times as many heatwaves, twice as many wildfires and nearly three times as many droughts as their grandparents.¹ We must begin to seek remedies which will help mitigate our overburdened communities from further deterioration related to pollution. When we stem the tide (pun intended) of *added* impacts, it helps to diminish the acceleration of long-term impacts.

With the increase in climate disasters like those recent and recurring events in Ellicott City and Annapolis, we must also consider disaster recovery in our Justice 40 plans. Disaster recovery from climate is often slowed in BIPOC communities because FEMA Aid does not reach those with greatest need. Consider the findings in the *2020 National Advisory Council Report to the FEMA Administrator*:

- The poorest renters were 23% less likely than higher-income renters to get help with housing after a disaster.
- The poorest homeowners receive about half as much to rebuild their homes compared with higher-income homeowners.
- FEMA was about twice as likely to deny housing assistance to lower-income disaster survivors because the agency judged the damage to their home to be “insufficient”.
- Disaster survivors are fighting displacement
- FEMA has not analyzed where there are racial disparities in who receives money after disasters.

As a byproduct of redlining, people of color are 61% more likely to live in a county with unhealthy air than white people and are three times more likely to live in a County that failed all three air quality grades.² African American residents in these communities are almost three

¹ Thiery *et al* (2021).

² American Lung Association, *State of the Air*, 2021

times more likely than whites to die from asthma related causes.³ And African-American children have an asthma death rate eight times that of non-Hispanic white children.⁴ The communities of Brandywine, Lothian, Curtis Bay, Hebron, and others have had to bear an unequal burden of air, water, and ground pollution. Beyond health, these impacts cut across housing, employment, education, food sovereignty, and generational wealth.

With the Justice 40 Initiative, we need to develop and implement cross-sector and interdisciplinary initiatives that place justice and equity at its center. We must use these funds to ensure building just, health and sustainable communities. Climate action plans and campaigns need to support health equity, environmental, and racial justice partnerships, networks, and consortia for a “just transition” for (not listed in order of importance):

- Energy, Food, and water insecurity
- Equitable development
- Families below poverty
- Loss of Natural Land Cover and Tree Equity
- Health, income, and wealth gap
- Resilient communities, and
- Empowering frontline communities

While the proposed environmental justice definitions help to identify eligible communities, it is imperative we also consider:

- Establishing a baseline of research and assessments, specifically health, relative to environmental/air (monitoring), water, and land quality, to understand the impact/degree of damage related to each pollutant within a given geography -- some pollutants and overlaying conditions are more detrimental, deadly than others.
- What is the proximity of the geography to polluting source(s) -- Fence line/Frontline?
- What is the hierarchy for the physical definition of the community? By City, Town, community, Zip Code, mile radius, or other?
- Length of exposure -- some communities are older and have had greater, longer exposure to pollutants.

We must use these funds to ensure building just, healthy, and sustainable communities. Climate action plans, and campaigns need to support health equity, environmental, and racial justice partnerships, networks, and consortia for a “just transition” for:

- Energy, Food, and water insecurity
- Equitable development
- Families below poverty
- Health, income, and wealth gap
- Resilient communities and schools, and
- Empowering frontline communities

³ CDC (2021)

⁴ Ibid.

For the reasons mentioned above, the NAACP Maryland State Conference urges a favorable report on HB 1033. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ SR Hartwell

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