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Ensuring Environmental Justice for All

HB 2696: Del. Herring (D-Alexandria)

LIS Bill Description: HB 2696 provides that an Environmental Justice Advisory Council is established, consisting of 13 members, to advise the Governor on environmental justice in the Commonwealth through equitable development, implementation, evaluation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, policies, and practices.

Background: Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people — regardless of race, color, national origin, or income — with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws and policies. It is based on the principle that no segment of the population, especially individuals most impacted and vulnerable, should bear disproportionately high or adverse effects of environmental pollution. Environmental justice calls for the decrease of environmental burdens, rather than the equitable distribution of pollution.

This bill would codify the existing Advisory Council on Environmental Justice. Doing so would ensure that the Commonwealth commits to permanently recognizing the importance of a safe and stable climate and clean air, water, and land for all Virginians regardless of who is heading the executive branch.

We support **HB 2696 (Herring)** because codifying the Advisory Council on Environmental Justice will:

- Assist to “protect [the Commonwealth’s] atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth” in keeping with the **Constitution of Virginia**.
- **Keep Virginia among states leading** the commitment to environmental justice.
- **Increase public safeguards.** Everyone deserves to be free from discrimination by being protected from pollution. Unfortunately, all too often, environmental burdens disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, people of color, and low-income communities.
- Help identify and lift barriers and increase participation. **Ensure sustained communication** between the state and directly with marginalized communities and facilitate intra-agency and inter-agency collaboration.

*For more information, please contact **Kendyl Crawford, Director of Virginia Interfaith Power & Light**, at kcrawford@vaipl.org.*