

FACT SHEET



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Codify the Virginia Environmental Justice Council

Support:

SB 883 – Sen. Locke

HB 1042 – Del. Herring

Problem: **Polluting facilities are often placed in marginalized and overburdened communities.**

In the Commonwealth, that is no different. Vulnerable populations in Virginia continue to bear increased risks from all kinds of activities, including oil, gas, and mineral extraction, new polluting facilities, the burning and transport of fossil fuels, and the impacts of climate change itself.

Environmental justice deals with fairness—how both the benefits and burdens of natural resource development are distributed.

Policy solution:

The Virginia Council on Environmental Justice should be codified. It is an advisory, which will advise the Governor and provide recommendations that maintain a foundation of environmental justice principles intended to protect vulnerable communities from disproportionate impacts of pollution and displacement.

The bills codify the existing Council and body, established in 2019 by Governor Northam by Executive Order 29. This Council's structure and organization is consistent with that of the gubernatorial advisory boards and councils in the Code of Virginia.

The bill also defines “environmental justice” and “resilience” for the first time in Virginia Code.

This bill includes language that specifies Council membership shall be representative of traditionally underserved and underrepresented groups including Native American tribes, grassroots organizations, civil rights advocates, and members of impacted communities.

This is a direct recommendation from the 2018 and 2019 Councils on Environmental Justice. In 2019, Delegate Herring proposed a similar bill that did not pass.

Who benefits:

Low-income families and communities of color:

Many studies have shown disproportionate burdens placed on low-income communities, communities of color, and indigenous communities, such as pollution, hazardous workplace conditions, industrial operations and a shortage of access to playgrounds, parks, nutritious foods, etc.

Public health & engagement:

Environmental stressors are linked to significant health risks, such as cancer, heart disease, asthma among many others. Given disproportionate environmental burden and thus health impact, it is critical that communities have a voice in decisions impacting them.

The environment:

Reducing pollution in overburdened communities would help to care for all of Creation, including the Earth.

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Sources: *Virginia Conservation Network, Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative, Union of Concerned Scientists CSD*