

# FACT SHEET



virginia interfaith  
power & light

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## Support: Environmental Justice for All Virginians

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

Virginia has begun to make some progress on environmental justice issues. Unfortunately, vulnerable populations continue to be at increased risk from fossil fuel projects and production, toxic chemicals and the devastating consequences of climate change.

### **Policy solutions:**

Virginia should remedy this current and historical disparity of harm placed on low-income families and communities of color, by implementing an essential procedural framework required to ensure that policies and programs represent and benefit all Virginians. Environmental justice work should not be limited to one community or site.

- **Operationalize environmental justice within state agencies:** The Constitution of Virginia states that “it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution...for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth.”

State agencies should be employed in ensuring this promise. Clarifying the role and responsibilities of the governor’s secretaries, state agencies, and creating an inter-agency working group would create accountability for this important civil rights issue.

- **Codify the Environmental Justice Council:**

The current environmental justice council should be codified and \$100,000 appropriated for

operational funding. Doing so would ensure a stable commitment to and remove uncertainty stemming from the executive branch.

Funding is essential for the council to perform its basic task of providing recommendations with the input of environmental justice communities. This body should be tasked with oversight on environmental justice issues to most effectively address and prevent disproportionate burden.

### **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.

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

*Virginia Interfaith Power & Light collaborates, as people of faith, to grow healthy communities and advance climate justice through education, advocacy, and worship.*