

113TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 479

Recognizing the 20th anniversary of the Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 11, 2014

Mr. ELLISON (for himself, Mr. GRIJALVA, Ms. HAHN, Ms. LEE of California, Mr. MORAN, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. HOLT, Mrs. CHRISTENSEN, Ms. CHU, Mr. HONDA, Mr. LEWIS, Mr. NADLER, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Mr. QUIGLEY, Ms. NORTON, and Mr. CLEAVER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Natural Resources, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the 20th anniversary of the Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.

Whereas February 11, 2014, marks the 20th anniversary of Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations;

Whereas environmental justice is defined as 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, regulations, and policies”;

Whereas environmental justice means that all citizens should have the right and opportunity to participate in decisions and policymaking that affects their health;

Whereas environmental justice is characterized by the promotion of unprejudiced treatment of all cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and races, with respect to the advancement of environmental policies, regulations, and law;

Whereas the environmental justice movement is an extension of the civil rights movement, and draws particular attention to the environmental health dangers affecting communities, families, and individuals;

Whereas environmental justice groups work to create public policy that is ethical, secure the strict enforcement of laws for environmental protection, and guarantee the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment;

Whereas environmental justice communities fight to ensure the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decisionmaking, and promote the education of present and future generations to ensure the health of the natural world;

Whereas community-based organizations and grassroots advocates have distinguished themselves in the endeavor for civil rights, sometimes risking their health and sacrificing their lives to seek justice;

Whereas the protest against the siting of a chemical landfill in Warren County, North Carolina, led by local commu-

nity leaders and national civil rights groups, birthed the term “environmental racism” and brought national attention to the environmental justice movement;

Whereas the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 drafted and adopted 17 environmental justice principles, which served as a defining document for the grassroots environmental justice movement;

Whereas the Congressional Black Caucus promoted the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Environmental Equity Workgroup in 1992 to investigate concerns that minority and low-income populations were inadequately protected by the Nation’s environmental laws, leading to the creation of the EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice in 1992;

Whereas on February 11, 1994, President William J. Clinton declared that each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission;

Whereas the Executive order instructs each Federal agency to determine the injurious effects of its actions on minority and low-income communities, and devote attention to resolving these issues;

Whereas the aim of the environmental justice Executive order is to increase access to public information and participation for minority and low-income populations, and encourage nondiscrimination in Federal programs that impact the environment and human health;

Whereas responsible environmental health policies and practices are critical to improving the lives of those who live in low-income communities and communities of color throughout the United States and the world;

Whereas inequities in environmental protection based on race and income status are recognized across the United States;

Whereas research has shown that income and race are directly correlated to greater exposure to pollution, closer proximity to toxic pollution sources, and greater health impacts from particulate matter air pollution;

Whereas African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians are exposed to greater air toxics concentrations than Whites in every metropolitan city in the United States;

Whereas communities with a higher percentage of low-income citizens bear a disproportionate level of society's environmental burdens;

Whereas race, independent of poverty, is a predictor of greater exposure to environmental toxics;

Whereas minority, low-income, and tribal communities are more exposed to air pollution from highways, power plants, incinerators, landfills, waste sites, and vehicle depots in these communities;

Whereas 68 percent of African-Americans and 39 percent of Latinos live within 30 miles of a coal plant;

Whereas tribal communities are disproportionately exposed to pollution and health burdens across the United States due to siting of pollution sources, cultural activities, and legal gaps in the regulatory framework;

Whereas environmental mitigation in tribal communities is behind that of nontribal communities in the United States;

Whereas inner-city, low-income, and minority children have the highest asthma rates and subsequent asthma-related

death rates resulting from greater exposure to indoor and outdoor air pollutants;

Whereas cumulative effects such as substandard housing and inadequate health care can increase vulnerability to pollution;

Whereas climate change is one of the biggest public health threats of this century, disproportionately impacting communities less able to recover from extreme weather events that are caused and exacerbated by climate change;

Whereas low-income communities, tribal communities, and communities of color have greater climate vulnerability due in part to lack of health care, dependence on public transportation and other public services, higher energy costs, less-than-adequate protection from severe weather, and higher insurance costs;

Whereas risk factors for heat-related deaths are higher for people with low incomes and people of color, and climate change will lead to an increase in frequency and intensity of heat waves, and a stronger heat island effect; and

Whereas reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building climate resiliency in low-income, minority, and tribal communities can create economic stability through good jobs in clean energy, energy efficiency, and green infrastructure industries: Now, therefore, be it

- 1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—
- 2 (1) commemorates the achievements of the en-
- 3 vironmental justice movement over the last 20 years,
- 4 including—

1 (A) the institution of an environmental jus-
2 tice law, Executive order, or policy by the 50
3 States and the District of Columbia;

4 (B) the reinstatement of the Federal Inter-
5 agency Working Group, Federal agency stra-
6 tegic plans, and Plan EJ 2014;

7 (C) the growth in the number of publica-
8 tions, research, and university-based environ-
9 mental justice centers, legal clinics, and aca-
10 demic programs; and

11 (D) the over 3,000 groups and a dozen
12 networks of community-based organizations
13 that have formed;

14 (2) affirms that Congress should uphold the
15 principles of environmental and climate justice by—

16 (A) recognizing that legislation passed by
17 Congress has foreseeable and unforeseeable ef-
18 fects on the existing disparities between com-
19 munities of differing socioeconomic statuses and
20 racial composition;

21 (B) committing to policies and practices
22 that protect the health, economic vitality, and
23 human and civil rights of low-income, tribal,
24 and minority communities; and

1 (C) creating policies that proactively ad-
2 dress climate vulnerabilities and promote resil-
3 iency in low-income, tribal, and minority com-
4 munities; and

5 (3) urges the President to—

6 (A) explicitly address environmental justice
7 issues in his climate change initiatives;

8 (B) commit to focusing on greater over-
9 sight and supporting Federal agency advance-
10 ment of environmental justice; and

11 (C) work with tribal leaders and commu-
12 nities to address their unique environmental
13 justice concerns.

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