

FACT SHEET



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Support: Environmental Justice for All Virginians

HB 704- Delegate Keam
HB 1042- Delegate Herring
SB 406- Senator Hashmi
SB 883- Senator Locke

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: HB 704 & SB 406

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: HB 1042 & SB 883

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.

Low-income families and communities of color benefits: 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 Engagement & Health benefits:

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 benefits:

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 (VAIPL) collaborates with people of faith to grow healthy communities and advance climate justice through education, advocacy and worship. VAIPL is a program of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, which advocates social, economic, and environmental justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer, and action.