

SCR 17 – An Environmental Justice Framework for Oregon

May 5, 2021

Hearing in the House Energy & Environment Committee

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice-Chairs Helm and Brock Smith and members of the House Energy and Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on Senate Current Resolution 17, a framework for establishing environmental justice in our state. Senate Concurrent Resolution 17 declares that it is the intent of this and future Legislative Assemblies to provide greater public participation in government functions, particularly the full and fair participation of Black, Native American, and People of Color communities, essential workers, youth, low-income people, and those who are most vulnerable in rural and urban communities. This resolution is not a Bill with statutory authority. It doesn't attempt to answer every question on the issue of environmental justice, or identify every possible solution to the problems that arise from environmental injustice. What the resolution does do is set out the principles and shared understandings that we need as we begin to ask the right questions and seek meaningful solutions. Resolving together to adopt a common understanding of environmental justice is of utmost importance to correcting historical unfairness in environmental protection policies.

Throughout modern history resolutions have spelled out the obligation to take special care to improve the conditions of those who have faced disproportionate burdens and patterns of exclusion. SCR 17 is Oregon's opportunity to be on the right side of history, much in the same way as when representatives of the United Nations General Assembly joined together to adopt the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) to call out the atrocities and genocide of World War II and set a universal standard of fundamental human rights.

It is notable that the House Committee on Energy and Environment is holding a public hearing on a resolution for environmental justice on Cinco de Mayo, a date has become associated with the celebration of [Mexican-American](#) culture in America. Yet, even as we celebrate our country's racial and cultural diversity, SCR 17 reminds us that there is still work to do to amplify the voices and needs of those people who have long been intentionally underserved and overburdened. The resolution acknowledges the legacy and impact of environmental injustice in our State, and recognizes that we need a statewide discussion on what environmental justice looks like and what is needed to achieve it.

The resolution further acknowledges that we can commit to ensure the peoples' basic rights to clean air and water, a healthy living environment, and respect and support for living a dignified existence.

It's been seventy years since the first declaration on human rights and many subsequent declarations that charted a course to taking reparative and restorative action. I urge you to support SCR 17 and help Oregon take its place in a long legacy of declarations that propel humans toward an inclusive and equitable community.

Sincerely,

Lisa Arkin, Executive Director of Beyond Toxics

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