

Hearing in the House Energy & Environment Committee
SCR 17 – An Environmental Justice Framework for Oregon
May 5, 2021

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

For the record, my name is Grace Brahler (she/her) and I serve as the Oregon Climate Action Plan and Policy Manager for Beyond Toxics.

Just as climate change presents us with an existential challenge, it also provides an opportunity to reimagine our state's future and to decide to make that future safe and equitable for all who live, work and play in our communities; a future wherein we properly steward our natural environment. In order to achieve this future, we must always bear in mind the history of our state, the differences in how populations are able to respond to a changing climate, and the varied needs of residents.

Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 17 provides the framework for state leaders to expressly recognize that frontline communities (Black, Native American, Indigenous and People of Color communities, immigrant and low-income communities that historically and presently experience the brunt of health, economic and ecological impacts) and “essential workers, youth and low-income, and vulnerable rural and urban communities are at risk of irreparable harm from the consequences of climate change impacts, natural disasters and disruptions, and public health crises.”

To state just one example, our dependence on water defines us and connects us. Yet, rural communities in Oregon are experiencing the impacts of more common and more intense periods of drought, extreme flooding events, and out-of-date infrastructure. Many rural residents rely on wells for water, which are not regulated by the state. Domestic wells suffer from contamination from sources like agricultural runoff--including fertilizer, pesticides, and chemical pollution--or outdated septic tank systems. However, testing, repairs and upgrades are costly and inaccessible to many vulnerable rural residents.

In light of these struggles, SCR 17 states that: “Whereas *water is life*, access to clean water is a basic human right and Oregon communities are facing water crises and resultant health impacts due to decaying and outdated infrastructure, environmental degradation and a changing climate” (emphasis added). It recognizes the need for safe and affordable drinking water for all Oregonians, which requires much-needed investments in watershed protection and water infrastructure.

Equity will exist when those who have been most marginalized have equal access to opportunities, power, participation, and resources and all have avenues to safe, healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives. It requires restructuring deeply entrenched systems of privilege and oppression that have led to the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens over multiple generations. I urge you to support SCR 17 to ensure that these critical principles of equity will be at the heart of Oregon lawmaking.

Thank you all for your service, time, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Grace Brahler, Oregon Climate Action Plan & Policy Manager at Beyond Toxics

gbrahler@beyondtoxics.org