

February 2, 2022

To: House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Prof. Janet Lorenzen, Salem, OR

Re: HB 4077 “EJ for ALL”

Environmental Justice Council Funding and Equity Data Mapping

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Brock Smith, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4077. My name is Prof. Janet Lorenzen, I live in Salem, Oregon. As a sociologist I ♥ data and I value environmental justice (EJ) for all Oregonians.

When I was on the Salem Climate Action Plan Task Force, I watched community members passionate about equity, including myself, have their recommendations sidelined because the consultant we were working with did not know where to find equity data about Oregon. I sent them information on several sources of equity data that they would need to cobble together, but because the data was not readily available the consultant deemed it beyond the scope of their work. **Wouldn't it be better if there was an equity data map of Oregon, so cities didn't have to create their own?** What if cities use different data sources and they operationalize their variables differently? What a mess! **Now is the time to create a state equity data map!**

Many state agencies are expected to use an equity lens for their work, this is supported by the Governor's Executive Order 20-04 on climate and equity. How do you use an equity lens if you don't have mapped data of cumulative environmental harms and demographics? How do you know who is most effected by pollution or drought? And how do you know where investments would make the most difference?

I sat in on the rulemaking process for the **DEQ's Climate Protection Program** as part of a research study. The details of equity (like where it would be unwise to allow offsets or where to invest the Community Climate Investments) had to be left up to an equity committee to be convened in the future because the DEQ did not have access to a map that overlays demographic variables onto cumulative environmental harms. The lack of access to mapped data abruptly halted conversation about which communities had the highest exposures to environmental and industrial harms. DEQ staff members just changed the subject when EJ advocates demanded that DEQ [create and consult a map like the one in Washington State](#). Making a map would take too long, the rulemaking had to go on without one. **It's hard to build trust between state agencies and community-based organizations when agencies don't have the data to fulfill community demands for equity.**

I sit in on the monthly DAS Geospatial Enterprise Office **equity data mapping meetings** run by Kathleen Helms. The meetings include staff members from many different state agencies, but it's a hodge podge of people and it's challenging to make it to every meeting when it's considered voluntary, extra work. **They need help coordinating between different agencies and communicating best practices on equity-based data sources and variables. This work needs institutionalized coordination!**

The Federal EJSCREEN is inadequate. [FROM EJSCREEN FAQ](#): “EJSCREEN outputs should be supplemented with additional information and local knowledge before taking action to address potential EJ concerns... EJSCREEN is limited in the types of data it can collect because it is a national-level screening tool, and its outputs should be one part of a screening process which also incorporates local knowledge and data such as might be found in other tools. EJSCREEN results are not meant to replace or supersede the use of other federal, state or local tools or their underlying data.” For example, EJSCREEN does not include data on radon or local health outcomes. And no data from the Census or the American Communities Survey is included. Also, “the tool is not designed to take into account quantifiable cumulative or synergistic effects.”

California and Washington State already have interactive environmental equity maps at the census tract level. We need Oregon-specific data at the level of census tracts that is community-informed and publicly accessible. **Oregon needs to catch up with this trend or policy making with an equity lens will lack the tools necessary for success!**

The Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) has been an unfunded, all-volunteer affair for too long. Have you noticed the number of seats going unfilled in the last few years? Have you noticed how much help state agencies are asking for to figure out how to prioritize equity? **The EJTF needs paid staff and a budget, now more than ever! The new EJ Council will show Oregonians that we value environmental and racial justice.**

The demands on EJ community-based organizations are skyrocketing! They participate in city-level politics, state legislative policy making, and now the demand for them to participate in state agency rulemaking is increasing. **The new EJ Council can help EJ groups build capacity to fulfill all the demands that the state is making on them.**

The challenges to EJ communities are only going to get worse with climate change. I’m writing to support HB 4077 because I know that in order to create and implement a just plan for the future of Oregon’s environment, **we need fine-grained data and dedicated resources to continue bridging connections between state agencies and the public to raise concerns brought by environmental justice communities, including rural communities!** I urge you to pass HB 4077 to take an important step towards envisioning environmental justice for all. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Prof. Janet A. Lorenzen
Chair and Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
Willamette University
Salem, OR