



SIERRA CLUB

OREGON CHAPTER

HB 4077 – Environmental Justice Council and Mapping

Testimony by Terry J. Harris, Sierra Club Oregon Chapter Legislative Committee
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources - February 7, 2022

The Sierra Club Oregon Chapter submits this **testimony in favor of HB 4077**, which reorganizes the previous task force, elevates environmental justice concerns in environmental decision-making, and directs DEQ and OHA to develop an environmental justice mapping tool.

The legislation, if enacted, would constitute a significant upgrade for consideration of environmental justice concerns in agency decision-making, especially with emphasis on overburdened and highly impacted communities as defined in the bill. Meanwhile, maps can be an important tool to identify unfair burdens and mis-distributed benefits that can constitute injustice. So, we strongly support this legislation.

But maps alone are insufficient to tell complete stories of environmental injustice. Agencies still need to remember that the tool is not a substitute for engaging and listening to the affected communities. Lines on a map can mis-define communities. Indeed, some communities are not found on a map. We support the designation and definition of “highly impacted communities” and “overburdened communities” but these designations need to be made with care so as not to be under-inclusive, geographically or otherwise, or to be so over-inclusive to be meaningless.

Moreover, a tool is not a remedy. The ability to identify and perhaps map injustice is only the first step. Restorative justice, procedural justice, and social justice are all components of a more complete environmental justice.

Similarly, we appreciate and support the fact that this legislation recognizes and emphasizes “meaningful involvement” as important and we support the definition and its use in the bill. But sometimes truly meaningful involvement requires community technical assistance. If not in this legislation, someday we would suggest that community technical assistance be built into future decision-making affecting highly impacted and overburdened communities.

The Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club represents some 63,000 members and supporters as the state chapter of the oldest conservation organization in the United States.

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