

February 8, 2022

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4077. My name is Akash Singh and I am writing on behalf of the Union of Concerned Scientists, an organization dedicated to the use of sound science in public policy. UCS is proud to be supported by more than 10,000 Oregonians, including over 500 professionals who are a part of our Science Network.

I am writing in support of HB 4077 because I know that in order to create and implement a just plan for the future of Oregon's environment, we need region-specific data and dedicated resources to continue bridging connections between state agencies and the public to raise concerns brought by environmental justice communities. HB 4077 is a historic opportunity for Oregon to do just that and apply the building blocks of science in service of an equitable environment for all Oregonians.

Environmental justice is a key pillar of advancing racial, economic, and environmental equity for all Oregonians. It alleviates the disparate burden of environmental harm suffered by low-income Oregonians and Oregonians of color. It helps create policies that, by focusing on the communities suffering the most, also protect everyone else. It creates a foundation upon which all Oregonians can live and thrive in a clean, green, and healthy environment.

In order to most effectively and efficiently create, implement, and review environmental justice policies, Oregon needs a vulnerability mapping tool. Data and mapping capacity is critical to determine how advocates and policymakers can develop government policies and programs to serve vulnerable and highly impacted communities. Programs such as [CalEnviroScreen](#) in California, the [Washington Health Disparities Map](#), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's [Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#) have paved the way for such tools to be actively used in environmental policy.

Along with the vulnerability mapping tool, it is critical to support the transition of the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) into the Environmental Justice Council. The EJTF was created through SB 420 in 2007 to help protect Oregonians from disproportionate environmental impacts on vulnerable populations. While the EJTF encourages state agencies to give all Oregonians knowledge and access to improve decisions that affect their environment and health, it remains a voluntary and advisory body.

As such, the EJTF lacks adequate resources and the infrastructure necessary to continue their work within environmental justice communities and has never had a budget or designated staff person. In order for the EJTF to function as an effective state agency designed to help protect all Oregonians, it needs adequate designation and resources.

Over time, the EJ Council has the capacity to represent all of Oregon and it is specifically designed to make sure that it does not leave any group of Oregonians behind. The EJ Council is specifically designed to include Oregonians of color, low-income Oregonians, and Oregonians from every part of the state.

I urge the Legislature to recognize the immediate need that vulnerable and highly impacted communities have for greater environmental justice infrastructure within state policy decision-making. HB 4077 will effectively and efficiently build upon the EJTF to better equip Oregonian policymakers and advocates. I urge the Legislature to support HB 4077 and choose the well-being and health of all present and future Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Akash Singh, JD  
Western States Policy Advocate  
Union of Concerned Scientists