

PRAMILA JAYAPAL
7TH DISTRICT, WASHINGTON

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
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IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON REGULATORY REFORM,
COMMERCIAL, AND ANTITRUST LAW

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4707

319 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3106

1904 3RD AVENUE
SUITE 510
SEATTLE, WA 98101
(206) 674-0040

May 4, 2017

Scott Pruitt
Environmental Protection Agency
Administrator
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write to strongly urge you to strengthen and build on the successes of the Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Program. Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, called to attention the fact that certain communities face disproportionate impacts of climate change, namely communities of color, low-income communities, indigenous peoples, people with limited English proficiency, and people living with disabilities.i

As the administrator of the EPA, you are the Chair of the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice (IWG) established by EO 12898, and you are in the unique position of being able to build on the progress that has been made to ensure that environmental justice principles are incorporated into the work being done by the EPA and other IWG member agencies.

According to the *Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Environmental Justice Progress Report*, "Many low-income, minority, and tribal communities are disproportionately impacted by air pollution and are not able to participate in environmental decisions due to barriers that prevent them from meaningfully engaging in the process. As a result, their voices are often unheard."ii The EPA's Environmental Justice Program has the capacity to help close that gap. So far, it has had documented success on projects and initiatives around the country, ranging from providing funding for urban farming to connecting frontline communities to the EPA rulemaking process.iii

It is extremely important to continue this progress, because more than 20 years after EO 12898 was signed, there are still documented disparities in how communities are affected by climate change and air pollution. For example, the prevalence of asthma for people who live in these frontline communities is higher than it is for the general population. When compared to white children, African American children are hospitalized at a rate of 2 to 1 and are four times more likely to die from asthma.iv Race is the number one indicator of whether or not a person lives near a hazardous waste site, and many of these siting decisions are carried out by the EPA, underlining the importance the Agency continuing to incorporate environmental justice into its work.v

Following Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, we saw extreme disparities in how disaster mitigation and relief were distributed among communities. FEMA's first permanent disaster recovery center in Mississippi was installed more than 15 miles from frontline communities in Gulfport, and HUD funds were disproportionately weighted toward homeowners, rather than low-income renters.vi

Native Americans and Indigenous peoples are facing particular challenges because their traditional places, food sources, and lifestyles are at risk due to climate change. Alaska native and native coastal communities have already started to suffer from the negative side effects of climate change, being forced to leave their homes in search of a new beginning. Shellfish populations are suffering due to ocean acidification as a result of carbon dioxide emissions, threatening the ability of indigenous peoples to harvest shellfish.^{vii}

EO 12898 set the framework for incorporating environmental justice into the decision-making processes of the EPA and other IWG agencies. We must act on climate change, recognizing that frontline communities have continually been most impacted by its effects.

We urge you to continue the work of the EPA's Environmental Justice Program, and ensure that the EPA is making decisions and developing policies that address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on our most vulnerable communities.

Sincerely,


PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress


A. DONALD McEACHIN
Member of Congress


NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGAN
Member of Congress

i Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, 3 C.F.R. 59 (1994).

ii *FY 2015 Annual Environmental Justice Progress Report* (Rep.). (2016). Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency.

iii Ibid.

iv *Children's Environmental Health Disparities: Black and African American Children and Asthma* (Rep.). (2014). Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency.

v Covert, Bryce. (2016, February 18). *Race Best Predicts Whether You Live Near Pollution*. The Nation.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/race-best-predicts-whether-you-live-near-pollution/>

vi *Environmental Justice through the Eye of Hurricane Katrina* (Rep.). (2008). Retrieved April 12, 2017, from Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; Health Policy Institute website:

https://web.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/key_issues/Environment_policy.pdf

vii Crimmins, A., Balbus, J., Gamble, J.L., Beard, C.B., Bell, J.E., Dodgen, D., Eisen, R.J., Fann, N., Hawkins, M.D., Herring, S.C., Jantarasami, L., Mills, D.M., Saha, S., Sarofim, M.C., Trtanj, J., and Ziska, L. (2016). *The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment* (Rep.). Washington, DC: U.S. Global Change Research Program.