

WRITTEN TESTIMONY REGARDING H.R. 5986 THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR ALL ACT

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Good afternoon Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the Committee.

Today is incredibly important to the community in which I come from and me. The Environmental Justice for All Act addresses many of the obstacles that our communities and others that look like ours battle every day. My name is Andrea Vidaurre, a co-founder and member of the People's Collective for Environmental Justice - we are a collective of residents organizing to fight for a better quality of life in our neighborhoods of the Inland Empire of California.

Our region is known by some as the shopping cart of America because it is likely that the Amazon package you ordered online or the stuff you find in your retail store was moved through my community. My community, is about an hour east of two of the largest ports in the world - the Port of Los Angeles and Port of Long Beach, which brings in about 40% of the nation's goods - is transforming the once suburban and rural Inland Empire into a profitable sacrifice zone for some of the wealthiest companies in the world, specifically in the communities that are predominantly Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Retail giants like Amazon and Walmart, automobile companies, the Class 1 railroads like BNSF and Union Pacific have set up their logistics shops here, making it possible for them to reap the benefits of record profits, even during a pandemic. On average, thousands of trucks drive right by our homes, our schools, and community spaces every day. Warehouses have been built as close as 70 ft from people's homes. Our region is currently in a battle against a 40 million square foot warehousing complex, which is approximately 700 football fields in size and would bring in over 10,000 trucks every day to a region that ranks in the 90th percentile of toxic air pollution.

Currently, we do not have the protections that safeguard our health from the massive cumulative impacts we are seeing, which have severe consequences for the communities forced to live with these injustices. San Bernardino and Riverside County are ranked nationally as the top counties for having the worst ozone pollution. Health studies show that underdevelopment of lung capacity, childhood asthma, and other illnesses are pervasive here because of the environment. These consequences have prematurely taken loved ones from our families.

We are forced to normalize a toxic environment because our families and other loved ones are dependent on an extractive economy to survive and protect their families - the logistics industry is rampant in wage theft, misclassification of workers, and unsafe working conditions. In our region, where Amazon is the top private employer and logistics is a leading industry- only 4 of out 10 jobs in the area pay a living wage. This slow violence exists day-to-day, and it has generational impacts. Environmental racism not only impacts your health, it impacts your social mobility, the generational wealth we can pass on, the toll on our safety nets and healthcare systems, and the future of our climate crisis. In the United States, transportation emissions are the number one emitter of greenhouse gasses. If we are to tackle climate change, it has to start in the communities that are being most impacted.

Workers and their families cannot afford to normalize extractive economies, especially when communities like ours call for real solutions like thriving wages in an industry that has seen so much profit and a transition into energy usage that stops the expansion of what we call diesel death zones. It's clear that solutions to address environmental racism in communities like mine can't come soon enough.

The Environmental Justice for All Act is crucial because we need to highlight the systemic racism that exists structurally. We need to uplift our frontline communities and provide protections that will better equip and safeguard our health and resources. I want to emphasize some pieces of the Environmental Justice for All Act that will be especially impactful for communities like mine:

For one, ensuring that permitting decisions fully reflect on-the-ground realities and cumulative impacts are vital. If we are to only look at every development independently, we would not understand the bigger picture. We have to analyze the regional impact that these systems have on our health, traffic, congestion, and overall quality of life. Ignoring cumulative impacts explains the continued injustices we see in the Inland Empire.

Second, we need the National Environmental Policy Act strengthened. This is the vehicle for which we can inform and advocate for our concerns over projects that will impact us. Our communities are given little to no time about upcoming projects, and transparency is key for establishing a healthy relationship with the public. We are tired of having leadership in our cities state that the meetings they hosted were poorly attended, thus rushing a decision with limited public input. Imagine finding out about the new development in your backyard when the airplanes flying overhead changed to unacceptable amounts.

Locally, we found out about an expansion at the San Bernardino Airport for Amazon's air cargo hub through a newspaper article. It took a group of community members, leaders and organizations to get involved and inform neighborhoods of detrimental changes to the surrounding landscape. Without our work, the agencies in charge of conducting meetings for the community wouldn't have translated material, provided interpretation or achieved the robust public participation needed to proceed.

Community groups on the ground and in direct contact with the public need resources and support to provide free tools, materials, and guidance to address environmental concerns. Some challenges to accessing these resources include funding inaccessibility, increasing upfront and start-up costs, difficulty matching grants and complex applications. Keeping these barriers will block many communities from even applying.

The Environmental Justice for All Act must continue to engage, allow feedback and center communities throughout the process. The practice of centering environmental justice communities is overdue and democratic. Environmental racism has impacted Black, Indigenous and communities of color for decades, this bill is a collective step to repairing undue harm and hardship. We need the Environmental Justice for All Act to live up to its name and support the end of the continued attacks on Black, Indigenous, and communities of color.