

June 23, 2020

San Diego County Board of Supervisors

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**Re: Establish the Office of Environmental Justice**

Dear Chair Greg Cox and Air Pollution Control Board,

The AB 617 Portside Environmental Justice Neighborhood Steering Committee urges the County of San Diego Air Pollution Control Board to establish and fully fund an Office of Environmental Justice. The creation of an Office of Environmental Justice will serve communities in the region that are disproportionately impacted by toxic air pollution. The Office of Environmental Justice can help shift the San Diego Air Pollution Control District (APCD) focus on basin-wide emissions to localized emissions and their impacts on public health.

Since October of 2018, the Portside Steering Committee has been actively engaged with the APCD in the important work of monitoring air quality and currently developing the first AB 617 Community Emissions Reduction Program (CERP) in the region. The AB 617 Steering Committee is a diverse group of individuals, stakeholders and businesses focusing on addressing air quality impacts in Barrio Logan, Sherman Heights, National City, and Logan Heights through the Community Air Protection Program. This committee is working together to identify regulatory, land use, technological, programmatic, and other strategies to reduce the impact of air pollution in Portside.

We recognize that an Office of Environmental Justice will advance this work and this collaboration, at the exact moment when it is most important as it continues to complete the document. The new office will also ensure the implementation of the CERP, which can serve as a blueprint for reducing the disproportionate and unjust burden of air pollution for all San Diego disadvantaged communities.

According to the CalEnviroScreen 3.0, communities within the Portside Environmental Justice Neighborhood Steering committee are ranked within the top 5-15% most polluted neighborhoods in California.<sup>1</sup>The American Lung Association recently ranked San Diego as the sixth worst city with air

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oehha.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4560cfbce7c745c299b2d0cbb07044f5>

quality in the country<sup>2</sup>. Children in Barrio Logan are diagnosed with asthma at a rate eight times greater than children in La Jolla<sup>3</sup>. The global coronavirus pandemic has further exposed the disparate impacts of air quality on environmental justice. As COVID-19 continues to spread, research has shown that the virus is disproportionately impacting communities burdened by air pollution and pre-existing health conditions. A Harvard University research study "...found that a person living for decades in a county with high levels of fine particulate matter is 8 percent more likely to die from the coronavirus than someone in a region with one unit less of the fine particulate pollution."<sup>4</sup>

Now more than ever, it is crucial we must act to reduce exposure to pollution and improve public health, particularly in communities most impacted by COVID-19. As APCD is restructuring pursuant to AB 423, we have an opportunity to integrate equity and environmental justice at the agency's core by providing the additional support to AB 617 Community Emission Reduction Program (CERP) and other programs that require dedicated staff to authentically engage with community on developed targeted messaging and outreach strategy.

To ensure that the lens of environmental justice is integral to the decision made by the new APCD, the Office of Environmental Justice must:

- Be equal to other comparable positions and have autonomy to make decisions.
- Must be sufficiently staffed and funded with comparable salaries and budgets of other departments.
- Staff and leadership with experience in environmental justice issues, community organizing and bilingual.

As the State continues to provide additional dollars for incentive funding, those regions that are most engaged with collaborations on the ground will be better prepared to secure funding to upgrade technologies, infrastructure, and systems crucial for economic competition and advancing emissions reductions.

Prioritization of environmental justice communities is key to protecting communities from environmental burden and improving their public health. To uplift environmental justice communities, the AB 617 Steering Committee urges your Board to support establishing the Office of Environmental Justice.

Sincerely,

AB 617 Environmental Justice Neighborhoods Steering Committee  
(List of the committee members here)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stateoftheair.org/city-rankings/most-polluted-cities.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/documents/CHS-BHOFAQI\\_Asthma\\_SlideSet.pdf](https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/documents/CHS-BHOFAQI_Asthma_SlideSet.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/covid-pm>

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