



# Duckworth, Durbin Help Harris Introduce Comprehensive Legislation to Help Achieve Environmental Justice for All

July 31 2020 9:29 AM

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), co-founder of the Senate’s first Environmental Justice Caucus, and Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined Senators Kamala D. Harris (D-CA) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) to introduce the *Environmental Justice for All Act*, comprehensive environmental justice legislation to achieve health equity and climate justice for all, particularly underserved communities and communities of color. This legislation was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ-03), Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, and Representative A. Donald McEachin (D-VA-04). This important legislation was developed over the last year through a public process in collaboration with advocates and stakeholders in the environmental justice community.

“Communities of color face public health challenges—which also make them more susceptible to the effects of the deadly COVID-19 virus—at alarming rates while too many in power look the other way,” Duckworth said. “I’m proud to be helping Senator Harris introduce this important bill, which would go a long way to making sure that every American has the right to breathe safe air, drink clean water and live on uncontaminated land, regardless of their zip code, the size of their wallet or the color of their skin.”

“For generations, systemic racial inequities have made it more difficult for communities of color to drink clean water and breathe clean air. It’s time we finally pushed for environmental justice and addressed the factors that cause communities of color to be disproportionately harmed by dangerous toxins and pollutants that lead to long-term health consequences,” said Durbin. “I’m proud to join my colleagues in demanding that we push for justice for all, and that includes fighting for climate and health equity.”

“Confronting generations of systemic racism to achieve true justice will require us to recognize the role environmental racism has played and redress that by investing in long-term, sustainable environmental justice solutions to center and empower communities that have for far too long been excluded,” said Harris. “I’m thrilled to partner with Chairman Grijalva and Rep. McEachin and those who have fought for environmental justice for generations to introduce this legislation that will help us achieve environmental justice for all.”

“For too long, communities of color, indigenous communities and low-income communities have been disproportionately exposed to and harmed by pollution,” said Booker. “We cannot achieve lasting economic justice or social justice without ensuring environmental justice, and the Environmental Justice for All Act is another important step in continuing the fight to right these wrongs.”

As our nation reckons with systemic racism, our fight for clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment cannot be disentangled from the fight for justice. Environmental racism fuels disparities in environmental and public health and its impacts can be seen across society. Systemic barriers, including redlining, intentional disinvestment, and unregulated pollution, have systematically had a devastating impacts on communities of color.

U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Tina Smith (D-MN), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ed Markey (D-MA), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Tom Udall (D-NM) also helped introduce this legislation.

Specifically, the *Environmental Justice for All Act* would:

- Amends and Strengthens the Civil Rights Act of 1964: Prohibits discrimination based on disparate impacts and overturns *Alexander v. Sandoval*.
- Requires the Consideration of Cumulative Impacts: Explicitly adds cumulative impacts in permitting decisions under the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act.
- Codifies the Clinton Administration’s Environmental Justice Executive Order: Creates a working group to ensure compliance and enforcement and develop government-wide strategies.
- Reinforces the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): Requires early and meaningful involvement in actions impacting communities, including Tribes.
- Asserts Health Equity: Funds programs to study potentially harmful products marketed towards women and girls of color.
- Provides Outdoor Access for All: Establishes programs to ensure more equitable access to parks and the outdoors.

- Establishes Environmental Justice Grant Programs: Funds grants for research, education, and projects to address environmental and public health issues.
- Ensures a Fair and Just Transition: Establishes a Federal Energy Transition Economic Development Assistance Fund to support communities and workers as they transition away from fossil fuel-dependent economies.

Yesterday, Duckworth [introduced](#) a bill with U.S. Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE-AL) to improve air quality monitoring and protect front-line environmental justice communities. Duckworth [wrote](#) to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler earlier this month about EPA's delayed publishing of the final EtO rule—which is critical to protecting environmental justice communities—in the federal register. Duckworth and Durbin also this week [urged](#) EPA to conduct oversight and testing regarding the ongoing sewage problems in Centreville, Illinois.

The text of the *Environmental Justice for All Act* can be read [HERE](#).

A one-pager of the *Environmental Justice for All Act* can be read [HERE](#).

Duckworth [co-founded](#) the Environmental Justice Caucus, of which Durbin and Carper are members, in April of last year to raise awareness of the many environmental and pollution issues that have created public health challenges, which disproportionately impact low income communities and communities of color. The caucus seeks to help those communities advocate for themselves with the federal government by providing expertise and assistance, generating legislation and organizing hearings and events. Duckworth [brought](#) Illinois-based environmental justice advocate Celeste Flores as her guest to this year's State of the Union.