



Duckworth, Booker, Carper And Ruiz Introduce Bill To Address COVID-19's Impact On Communities Plagued By Environmental Injustice

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WASHINGTON - the second anniversary of U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Tom Carper (D-DE) founding the Senate's first-ever Environmental Justice Caucus, the Senators introduced legislation that would help support communities experiencing environmental injustices, which been exacerbated by the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the Environmental Justice for Communities Act would ensure EPA continues a trio of environmental justice programs, while authorizing \$50 million annually to support these initiatives. U.S. Representatives Raul Ruiz, M.D. (D-CA-36) introduced a companion bill in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“Communities of color and low-income communities face public health challenges at alarming rates, and these challenges—like high rates of asthma caused by poor air quality—make these communities especially vulnerable to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Duckworth. “I’m proud to join with colleagues in the House and Senate to introduce legislation that would ensure EPA continues critical environmental justice programs, while providing robust funding that will support communities of color which have been hardest hit by the deadly COVID-19 public health crisis.”

“The coronavirus is invisible but it has exposed so much of the reality we must now confront: even without COVID-19 plaguing us, communities of color, low income communities, and indigenous communities suffer disproportionate harm from pollution, including higher rates of cancer, birth defects, asthma, and more,” said Booker. “As we work to tackle this virus and plan for the future, we cannot afford to go back to what was normal before the pandemic. We must work to build a new normal, and this legislation is an important first step.”

“For too long environmental justice programs at EPA have not had the same legal footing as other programs,” said Carper. “This legislation puts them on an even playing field, ensuring that EPA continues to devote resources to environmental justice communities. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, I’m focused on putting equity and justice at the center of our efforts and I’m pleased to introduce this bill today that advances that critical goal.”

The Environmental Justice for Communities Act would ensure EPA continues the Environmental Justice Small Grants Program, the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement and the Community Action for a Renewed Environment Grant Program with the purpose of monitoring pollution in or near communities experiencing environmental injustices and investigating the disproportionate impacts of the COVID–19 pandemic on those communities.

The Environmental Justice Small Grant Program is a competitive grant that local community groups can apply for to mitigate local instances of environmental injustices. Environmental Justice Small Grants fund projects up to \$30,000, depending on the availability of funds in a given year.

- Previous project awards include water sampling; identifying contaminants in soil, food, and water; watershed restoration; monitoring water contamination, lead exposure, and indoor air quality.

The Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement Program provides funding to support community-based organizations in their efforts to collaborate and partner with local businesses, local governments, medical providers, academia, and other stakeholder groups as they develop and implement solutions that address environmental and/or public health issues for underserved communities. The term “underserved community” refers to a community with environmental justice concerns and/or vulnerable populations, including minority, low income, rural, tribal, and indigenous populations.

- Previous project awards include identifying toxic substances and lead exposure related to safe housing, cracking down on illegal dumping, water sampling and monitoring, air and water monitoring project, and improving water quality.

The Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) Grant Program provides support for communities to form collaborative partnerships; develop comprehensive understandings of risks from toxic and environmental pollutants; set priorities, identify, and carry out projects to reduce risks through collaborative action at the local level.

Duckworth recently [introduced](#) the Environmental Justice for All Act, sweeping legislation that would help achieve healthy equity and climate justice for all, particularly underserved communities and communities of color that have long been disproportionately harmed by environmental injustices and toxic pollutants. January of this year, Duckworth helped U.S. Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) and Congresswoman Cori Bush (D-MO-01) [announce](#) the introduction of legislation that would create and authorize funding for a system to comprehensively identify the demographic factors, environmental burdens, socioeconomic conditions and public health concerns that are related to environment justice and collect high-quality data. Duckworth also recently [secured](#) a commitment from EPA nominee Michael Regan to prioritize environmental justice and joined Booker and Carper in [applauding](#) the environmental justice efforts in President Biden's climate action plan. Last week, Duckworth also joined Durbin and Congresswoman Robin Kelly (D-IL-02) in [requesting](#) a review of the health risks associated with emissions from a metal recycling plant located on Chicago's Southeast Side.

Duckworth, Booker and Carper [co-founded](#) the Senate's first-ever Environmental Justice Caucus on April 22, 2019 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 also [brought](#) Illinois-based environmental justice advocate Celeste Flores as her guest to the 2020 State of the Union.