

Environmental Justice Caucus Co-Founders Celebrate Caucus's 5th Birthday, Urge Additional Funding

by Office of Senator Tammy Duckworth
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – On the fifth birthday of the U.S. Senate Environmental Justice Caucus, which was founded on Earth Day in 2019, the Caucus's co-founders and co-chairs U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Tom Carper (D-DE)—Chairman of the

U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW)—and Cory Booker (D-NJ) issued the following statement commemorating this historic milestone and announced a new effort to support President Biden’s Justice40 initiative aimed at helping address environmental injustice across the country:

“While we’ve made significant progress since we founded the Senate’s first-ever Environmental Justice Caucus five years ago today, we still have so much more work to do to protect every American’s right to breathe safe air, drink clean water as well as live, work and play on uncontaminated land. To help bring us closer to achieving that goal nationwide, today we’re calling on our colleagues to fully fund the Biden Administration efforts to carry out its ambitious Justice40 objectives and to work toward securing true environmental justice for every American, regardless of where they live. This major funding would provide EPA and CEQ with the long-overdue resources needed to help promote health equity, secure cleaner drinking water and tackle legacy pollution in communities that have borne the heaviest burdens of environmental contamination for far too long.”

Building on their previous efforts, the co-chairs and co-founders of the U.S. Senate Environmental Justice Caucus are urging the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations’ leadership to appropriate funding that meets or exceeds the \$11 billion request for the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in President Biden’s FY2025 Budget. With that support, the agency can do more to help clean up legacy pollution, promote justice and equity and foster economic empowerment in low-income communities, communities of color and Tribal communities throughout the country.

“President Biden has commendably elevated environmental justice to a central position on his administration’s agenda. We applaud this focus and recognize that sustained and historic investments in environmental justice initiatives across all federal agencies, including EPA and CEQ, are essential for achieving the President’s Justice40 objectives,” said the Senators in a letter sent to Appropriations Committee leaders today. “By funding these environmental justice efforts at or above the President’s budget request, our nation can take meaningful steps toward rectifying historical disinvestments in low-income communities, communities of color and Tribal communities.”

A copy of the full letter can be found on [Senator Duckworth’s website](#).

On Earth Day five years ago, Duckworth, Carper and Booker co-founded the Senate’s first-ever Environmental Justice Caucus to call attention to the many environmental issues affecting communities of color and low-income communities across our nation. As leaders of the Caucus, the Senators have led the charge on raising awareness, conducting oversight, elevating community voices, securing millions of dollars in federal funding for environmental justice projects as well as advancing legislation that is

cleaning up our nation's drinking water, addressing generational pollution and much more.

Since the Environmental Justice Caucus' inception five years ago, the co-chairs and co-founders have helped secure numerous environmental justice wins for working Americans, including:

- **[The Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act](#)**: Senator Duckworth's landmark legislation, which Chairman Carper led the EPW Committee to unanimously pass, became the foundation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The *Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act* is the most significant federal investment in our nation's water infrastructure in American history, providing more than \$35 billion for water resource development and lead removal projects. The legislation prioritized disadvantaged communities and included over \$15 billion to remove and replace lead service lines that is helping deliver cleaner drinking water across the nation.
- **Decentralized Wastewater Program**: Also included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is the Senator Booker-authored Decentralized Wastewater program, authorized at \$250 million over 5 years. This critical program will support investments in low- and moderate-income households that do not have access to adequate plumbing and often are forced to straight-pipe sewage from their homes without treatment. Senator Booker has also worked across party lines to expand an existing USDA program to help ensure that critical resources are available to people with failing septic systems.
- **[The Water Infrastructure Funding Transfer Act](#)**: This legislation from Senator Booker, which was signed into law, is helping communities get the lead out of their drinking water by making millions of federal dollars available to states to help fund drinking water projects.
- **Creation of the first-ever U.S. Senate Lead Task Force**: As Duckworth's DWWIA law is helping spearhead the removal of dangerous lead pipes throughout the country, Senators Duckworth and Booker co-founded the first-ever Senate Lead Task Force earlier this year to conduct oversight and help ensure lead pipe removal continues to be completed in an equitable and just manner.
- **\$50 million in Environmental Justice (EJ) Initiatives in the American Rescue Plan**: Congress allocated funding in the American Rescue Plan for grants, contracts and other activities that identify and address disproportionate environmental or public health harms as well as risks in underserved communities through a range of local initiatives.
- **\$3 billion first-of-its-kind Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grant program in the *Inflation Reduction Act***: This program provides grants to environmental justice communities throughout the country for air pollution remediation, mitigating health risks from extreme heat, reducing indoor toxins and

much more. The program also reserves \$200 million for technical assistance to help these communities apply for and use these funds.

- **\$5 billion to supply communities with clean school buses through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law:** This funding helps low-income, rural and Tribal schools replace old, dirty diesel buses with new zero emissions school buses and improve air quality in their communities.
- **\$27 billion to a first-of-its-kind Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) in the *Inflation Reduction Act*:** This program unlocks meaningful climate investments and advances environmental justice by helping nonprofits, states and other institutions use federal dollars to leverage private investments in projects that tackle the climate crisis—especially in low-income and disadvantaged communities. The GGRF is funding the \$7 billion Solar for All program to enable millions of low-income households to access affordable, clean solar energy.
- **Introduced the [A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act](#):** The most comprehensive environmental justice legislation in history, Senators Duckworth and Booker introduced this bill to help achieve health equity and climate justice for all by making communities a critical part of our environmental regulatory process and better protected, particularly in underserved communities and communities of color that have long been disproportionately harmed by environmental injustices and toxic pollutants.
- **Urged the EPA to [strengthen the Lead and Copper Rule](#):** Senators Duckworth and Booker led their colleagues in applauding the EPA for their proposed Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI) that will help us reduce lead in drinking water while also urging them to strengthen the rule by considering additional provisions that would improve and expedite the Biden Administration's effort to remove all lead service lines from our nation.
- **EPA and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) [creation of the Office of Environmental Justice](#):** Strengthening enforcement against the bad actors that exploit our most disadvantaged communities, this new office at the EPA and DOJ is helping prioritize environmental justice issues across the nation as well as protect public health and promote equity for every citizen, no matter their zip code.
- **The [White House Council on Environmental Quality \(CEQ\)'s Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#):** Launched in 2022, this critical new resource helps federal agencies better reach historically marginalized communities that have experienced legacy pollution.
- **Hearings on Climate Change and Environmental Justice:** The Senate EPW Committee has convened hearings on the need for further investments in air quality monitoring technology to benefit frontline and fence-line communities, the impacts of extreme heat on the transportation sector and reducing methane emissions from landfills. Also, Senator Duckworth and the Special Committee on the Climate

Crisis convened a historic [hearing](#) that brought attention to environmental justice issues and took input from mayors from around the country about what major cities are doing to address climate change.

- **The [Water Resources Development Act \(WRDA\) of 2022](#):** This legislation from Chairman Carper authorized much-needed investments in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects and programs, including more than a dozen Duckworth-authored provisions to bring water infrastructure projects to disadvantaged communities to help ensure their resiliency for the future.