

Susheela Jayapal



Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

To: Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Susheela Jayapal, Multnomah County Commissioner

Date: Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Re: Legislative Testimony on SB 792

Good afternoon Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Olsen and members of the committee,

My name is Susheela Jayapal and I am the new Multnomah County Commissioner for District 2, North and Northeast Portland. Thank you for allowing me time to provide testimony on Senate Bill 792.

As Senator Frederick and Speaker Kotek mentioned, this bill is a start to protecting the people who live in my community. As you know, in 2018, a fire broke out at an auto dismantler yard in my district. This fire created large black clouds of smoke that spread into nearby neighborhoods and throughout the district. Thousands of people were evacuated -- including local schools, parks and businesses. Two homes and a duplex were completely destroyed. The fire released toxic chemicals including sulfur dioxide, asbestos, acid gases, benzene, styrene and metals, all of which are extremely dangerous, particularly to children and aging adults.

I'd like to share a short story about one of my constituents, Graciela. Graciela was 11 years old and living on N. Lombard Ave near N Albina, which is about 4 miles from the dismantler yard where the fire took place. Graciela has suffered from asthma her entire life and often had to miss a day or two of school when the air quality was poor. When the fire occurred, there was so much smoke that the sky over Graciela's house turned black. She quickly started struggling for breath. Her parents rushed her to Emanuel Hospital where she ended up spending a week on a respirator. Graciela struggles still with her asthma and could face life threatening issues if she is again exposed to such bad air quality.

A quick google search shows more than 20 auto salvage businesses in my district. These businesses are dispersed throughout the area and surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The people living near these industrial areas are generally low-income, disproportionately people of color, and often are among those least able to weather the health and economic consequences of these environmental hazards. For these constituents, losing a home, or even an unexpected medical bill, can have devastating consequences.

While more work is needed on this issue, SB 792 is a start. It will provide a way for the state to make sure businesses are following the law and protecting our communities. I'm here to support the bill, and also to express my hope that it will continue to be worked on and improved in the next legislative session, where I hope to see more robust regulations and protections for our communities' health and well-being -- particularly the health and well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you

Susheela Jayapal



Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2