

TO: Senate Energy and Environmental Committee
DATE: 3/18/2021
RE: Written Testimony in Support of SCR 17

Dear Chair Beyer, Vice Chair Findley and Members of the Senate Energy and Environmental Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SCR 17. We, the undersigned organizations, have come together as a coalition to support environmental justice initiatives. We represent many thousands of Oregonians, particularly communities of color and people of low-wealth, who value clean air and water and respected and thriving communities.

It is imperative that Oregon leaders and decision-makers, make efforts to reckon with our State's exclusionary origins and address the lasting impacts of prejudicial policies.

Oregon's Exclusionary Origins

In 1849, African American people--both free and enslaved--were prohibited outright from coming to the Territory of Oregon. In 1859, Oregon became the only free state admitted to the union with a clause in its constitution explicitly excluding Black people from residing in the state. This exclusionary clause was repealed in 1926--fewer than 100 years ago.¹

Blatant discrimination continued as Black Oregonians were denied housing, schooling, and the mere freedom to move about after sundown. As a result of these discriminatory policies, Black Oregonians were regularly displaced from their community hubs and forced to resettle in unsafe neighborhoods close to polluting industries and destructive seasonal flooding problems.² The impacts of these environmental injustices are still evident today, as studies show, for example, that safe drinking water violations are higher for communities of color in Oregon.³ Highways and major arterials are more likely to be built next to, or built to separate, neighborhoods with greater populations of people of color leading to pollution, heat islands and blight.⁴ The lack of affordable and accessible quality housing for farmworkers has

¹ "Black Exclusion Laws in Oregon." Available at https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/exclusion_laws/#.X6hTVPNKjIU. Other examples of exclusionary laws include the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which officially impeded immigration of Chinese workers and led to violence toward Chinese workers, and the Alien Land Law passed in 1923 to prevent Japanese and Chinese immigrants from owning land. Bussel, Robert, and Daniel J. Tichenor. "Trouble in Paradise: A Historical Perspective on Immigration in Oregon." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 118(4):460. <https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.118.4.0460>.

² Eugene's Black Neighborhoods | Racing to Change: Oregon's Civil Rights Years." Available at <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/racingtochange/pre-civil-rights/eugenesblack-neighborhoods/>.

³ Samayoa, Monica. "Study: Safe Drinking Water Violations Are Higher For Communities Of Color." Oregon Public Broadcasting. September 25, 2019. Available at <https://www.opb.org/news/article/safe-drinking-water-act-violations-communities-colorstudy/>.

⁴ Valentine, Ashish. "The Wrong Complexion For Protection.' How Race Shaped America's Roadways And Cities." July 5, 2020. Available at <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/05/887386869/how-transportation-racism-shaped-america>

resulted in increased public health risks and health disparities linked with substandard living and working conditions for this population.⁵

The Power of Resolutions

A civil and just society operates by setting forth principles and building agreements that reflect our collective effort to allow people to have a high quality of life, happiness, opportunity and productivity. Throughout the history of resolutions adopted to guide a civil society, special care has always been given to uplift the conditions of those less fortunate who have faced disproportionate burdens and harms.

Communities of color and low-wealth rural communities are often the ones shouldering the burden of exposure to pollution, hazardous conditions and lack of basic amenities such as clean water. Identifying and adopting environmental justice principles is the critical first step to redress these disproportionate impacts. It is the obligation of a democracy to address social and economic threats and integrate long-term environmental protections for those who are most vulnerable.

By passing Senate Concurrent Resolution 17, the Environmental Justice Framework, Oregon takes its place in a long legacy of resolutions and declarations that propel humans toward a just community. This Concurrent Resolution is Oregon's opportunity to be on the right side of history, much in the same way as the adoption of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#), a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted in 1948 to acknowledge and call out the atrocities and genocide of World War II, representatives from all over the world set forth a universal standard of fundamental human rights. Since its adoption, over seventy human rights treaties seeking to end problems of inequity and injustice have been adopted.

Other notable landmark resolutions that outline a set of shared values guiding the way humans treat one another include the following:

- The [Declaration on the Rights of the Child](#), adopted in 1924, marking the first time the existence of rights specifically needed to protect children and the responsibility of adults towards children;
- The [Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), adopted in 1963 in condemnation of unequal treatment based on race;
- The [Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons](#), adopted in 1975, recognizing the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities;
- The [2016 resolution](#) to condemn human trafficking of women and children; and
- The [1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), which agreed to recognize the urgency of climate change and led to the 2016 Declaration on Climate Emergency to enact steps to address climate change.

⁵ American Public Health Association. "Improving Housing for Farmworkers in the United States Is a Public Health Imperative." November 1, 2011. Available at <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/09/10/32/improving-housing-for-farmworkers-in-the-united-states-is-a-public-health-imperative>

These declarations and resolutions gave rise to the inalienable right to live free from oppression and institutionalized discrimination and to develop one's fullest potential.

A Just Future for All Oregonians

SCR 17 will help guide Oregon toward a more just and sustainable future.

People value and care about shared principles and agreements. A common understanding of environmental justice freedoms is of utmost importance to correcting historical unfairness, disregard and exclusion. As governing bodies and agencies are following various pathways to address equity and justice, SCR 17 is a unifying document and contains basic principles of humanity that can bring disparate efforts within agencies and organizations together. Once the Legislature adopts a resolution outlining a framework of environmental justice principles, the next step is to take concrete action to discontinue and remedy the disproportionate levels of harm experienced by vulnerable individuals or classes of people.

It is often said that we need "all the tools in the toolbox" to achieve our collective goals. If that is true, then the ability of the Oregon Legislature to adopt a concurrent resolution on environmental justice can activate additional tools for elected officials to use to adopt new policies and end outdated practices. A Legislative body convenes to serve the people; this concurrent resolution on environmental justice works to amplify the voices and needs of those people who have long been underserved by this state's laws and policies. This resolution lends support and credence to the work many underrepresented communities want to see implemented.

In the future, as we take action on a declaration of shared convictions, Oregon will see social, political and economic benefits far beyond the specifics of this 2021 concurrent resolution. The next generations of Oregonians will look favorably upon the efforts of today's elected leaders to be accountable to human justice and environmental protections. Future Oregonians will care and feel deep pride in the tenets expressed by the 2021 Oregon Legislature through their adoption of SCR 17, the Environmental Justice Framework for Oregon.

We sincerely hope that members of the Senate Energy and Environment Committee will send SCR 17 to the full Senate with a do-pass recommendation for a floor vote. Thank you for the opportunity to work together to adopt a meaningful framework of principles for environmental justice and stand on the right side of history at this critical moment.

Sincerely,

Beyond Toxics

NAACP Eugene/ Springfield Branch Unit #1119

NAACP Portland Branch Unit #1120

Verde

OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon

Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste
(PCUN)

Oregon Chapter of the American Planning
Association

Urban Greenspaces Institute

Surfrider Foundation

Center for Biology Diversity

Rogue Climate

350PDX

Climate Solutions

LiveMove

Democratic Party of Oregon's Environmental
Caucus

Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network

Neighbors for Clean Air

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon/Oregon
Interfaith Power & Light

Rural Organizing Project

350 Eugene

Oregon Student Association

University of Oregon Climate Justice League

Elders Climate Action (ECA) - Oregon Chapter

Our Climate

Cascadia Action Network

UO Coalition Against Environmental Racism
(CAER)



