

TO: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

FROM: Quinn (Quynh Dien) Read

DATE: March 18, 2021

RE: Testimony in Support of SCR 17 – Establishing environmental justice framework of principles for State of Oregon

My name is Quinn (Quynh) Read, and I am a member of the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) and the Environmental Equity Committee of the Governor's Racial Justice Council. I am also the Oregon Policy Director for the Center for Biological Diversity. I respectfully submit the following comments in support of SCR 17.

We cannot do the crucial environmental justice work before us unless Oregon's leaders step up to say that we are going to protect the most vulnerable – particularly communities of color and low-wealth communities – and ensure that all Oregonians have the right to live, learn, work, and play in a clean, safe, and healthy environment. I believe SCR 17 provides a timely and necessary commitment to environmental justice in Oregon. We cannot take it for granted that this commitment is understood or assumed.

Environmental equity was identified as one of the priorities for the Governor's Racial Justice Council. Why? Because our system has created a dynamic in which vulnerable communities – particularly communities of color and low-income communities – bear greater risk from environmental hazards and have less access to environmental benefits.

Over the last several months, the Environmental Equity Committee has met regularly to discuss and propose solutions to a wide range of issues – from creating an environmental vulnerability analysis to ensuring clean water for all to increasing access to the outdoors. As we coalesced around a handful of high priority policies, we were faced with the reality of advocating for those policies in a system and culture that has marginalized our voices.

Not only that, we were faced with the very real fear of being subjected to abuse or harassment for advocating for the needs of people and communities that have long been underserved and under-resourced by our state's laws and policies. One need only look at the comments in recent op-eds on some of this proposed legislation to know these fears are well-founded. The set of principles before you today sends a much-needed signal to all Oregonians that environmental justice is a priority and an integral part of our values as a state.

The Environmental Justice Task Force was established in 2010, and over the last ten years it has developed wonderful collaborative relationships with staff from Oregon's natural resources agencies, provided guidance and recommendations on agency rulemakings, programs, and public processes, and served as a public forum for environmental justice communities. However, a task force is by its very definition a temporary body designed to address a single issue. But there's nothing temporary about Oregon's commitment to environmental justice. Nor is environmental justice a "single issue" topic. It's nuanced and complex and requires a significant investment of time and energy.

In recent years, public awareness of environmental injustice and inequity in Oregon has increased. So too has demand for the services and expertise of the task force. The task force is made up of volunteers like me who are there because we are personally invested in environmental justice. The task force has used its limited resources very efficiently, but the truth is that we are stretched thin.

To effectively continue our work will require a renewed and long-term commitment to environmental justice and the ability to effect meaningful policy changes. SCR 17 helps do exactly that by creating a common understanding and establishing a strong foundation for the critical environmental justice work before us.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at qread@biologicaldiversity.org.