



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of SCR 17

March 18, 2021

Chair Beyer, Vice Chair Findley, and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Khanh Pham. I represent House District 46. I am honored to testify today in support of SCR 17 as a sponsor for this bill alongside many members of the BIPOC Caucus.

SCR 17 will help the Legislature to start taking steps to acknowledge the deep interconnections between present environmental crises, historic and structural racism and the deep socio-economic inequities in the state.

I believe it is our collective responsibility to improve public health in Oregon, and **build a just, equitable, and resilient future.**

SCR 17 provides us the opportunity to uphold these values and to adopt them as a framework for legislative decision-making. The Environmental justice framework is a set of values calling for the involvement of all people regardless of race, income, and national origin in decisions that will directly impact their lives. This framework will shape Oregon's vision with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, policies, and decisions.

One area where this framework can be applied is to how the state responds to the disposal of hazardous waste. Most pollution in our environment is a result of the practice of externalizing unwanted costs of disposing of hazardous waste and toxic emissions onto the environment rather than internalizing those costs.

The cost of externalities is real and can often be quantified. The question is who ends up paying for them?

There is a large body of research that confirms environmental externalities accrue disproportionately to vulnerable communities, also called frontline communities. Historically, many communities of color were constrained by exclusionary laws, such as redlining, and these communities live on land contaminated by toxic wastes or in hazardous places such as low-lying areas near wetlands and river banks where flooding often occurs. These were areas where no one else wanted to live. There is a clear correlation between lowered property values based on environmental degradation or natural hazards and the socioeconomic status of those inhabiting these communities. Because these areas carry environmental costs, those costs are more acutely borne by those living in the area.

It is not only that poor people and people of color that disproportionately live in environmentally poor conditions. It is also that poor environmental conditions can help to keep people poor by making them pay the high health and economic costs, ranging from higher rates of childhood

asthma to lower home prices. These environmental conditions make it more difficult for frontline communities to take advantage of economic and wealth building opportunities.

We must unravel these patterns. The Legislature should acknowledge the problem and resolve to seek reparations and solutions.

Adopting this resolution sends a clear message that we will fulfill our duty to protect the health and well-being of all Oregonians, and will support each person's desires to realize their full potential. I urge your yes vote on SCR 17. Thank you.