



February 9, 2021

Good afternoon, Chair Beyer, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Akashdeep Singh and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon. I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 286.

Communities across the state of Oregon have been devastated by environmental crises that are becoming more frequent, severe, and unpredictable. As we build, legislate, and implement solutions to these crises, it is imperative that we meaningfully engage with underrepresented communities across the state.

In 2008, the state legislature created the Environmental Justice Task Force to address this inequity in engagement. The EJTF has brought together a group of experts and advocates who represent ethnic, geographic, and economic diversity. Over the past decade and more, the EJTF has served as important but advisory body whose members volunteer their precious time to help Oregon achieve environmental equity.

As an advisory board made up of volunteers, it can be difficult to retain and invite new members. When we ask volunteers from underrepresented communities to give us their time and expertise but don't provide them with resources, we are burdening them further. The EJTF also currently does not have a representative from the Commission on Indian Services and not having Indigenous representation on this body is harmful.

While we are now conducting a fair amount of legislative work virtually, we hope to engage in person by next session. When the EJTF's work is safe to conduct in person, we cannot expect rural Oregonians to continue traveling long distances without resources.

SB 286 takes an informative, engaging, and critical body deemed necessary by the Oregon State Legislature just over a decade ago and simply moves it. In doing so, SB 286 streamlines the environmental justice engagement process, removes confusion for commissioners who have to serve on disparately connected bodies, and gives an existing body of experts new teeth to fulfill its mission of protecting all Oregonians.

Housing the EJTF as the EJ Council within DEQ provides for a system of checks and balances so that the agency can fulfill its mission of alleviating environmental burdens for communities of color and low-income communities in urban and rural areas alike. It simply provides additional

tools so that DEQ can better serve underrepresented communities without unduly burdening the agency.

SB 286 represents a just, practical, and efficient step forward for environmental policymaking that addresses the needs of Oregon's most underrepresented communities.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Akashdeep Singh

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