



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

Listening Session Minutes – July 16, 2020

Virtual Only

Task Force members present

Victor Rodriguez

David Mendoza

Michael Furze

Laura Johnson

Peter Godlewski

Task Force staff present:

Elise Rasmussen, Project Manager

Hannah Fernald, Administrative

Coordinator

Esmael Lopez, Community Engagement

Coordinator

David Mendoza, Task Force Co-chair, called the public meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

David Mendoza, Co-Chair, welcomed attendees and introduced themselves and staff.

2. DRAFT MODEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Co-Chair Mendoza reviewed the slides on draft policy recommendations (on file) then opened the discussion to members of the public, who shared the following points:

- Clear connection between systemic racism and environmental injustices should be acknowledged as a public health crisis.
- Agencies are major polluters, but agencies also create many jobs. How can we make sure we aren't pushing industries out into less strict areas? How can we engage with the workforce, and the larger system, for a just transition into sustainable energy?
- We need to understand the relationship between smaller and larger agencies, local and state government, and then recommend a clear communication strategy from local government to state agencies.

Michael Furze, member, asked staff and Co-Chairs to speak more about the connection between reparations and environmental justice in the context of this Task Force.

3. DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES

Co-Chair Mendoza asked members to consider the balance between broad recommendations vs. specificity around accountability. How do we balance these things without understanding the nuances of all agencies and what framework is the state currently using to adhere to democratic principles?

David Ortiz, public participant, responded to Co-Chair Mendoza's question regarding authentic decision making. Mr. Ortiz stated, "We need to reimagine the way public

comments are used in government decision making [to] create a forum of discussion, not just a list of comments. Start with public comment sections in hearings and government work because communities need to be given better direction on how to raise issues. If you look at the EJTF, there should be a cheat sheet for members of the community, or an outline, for individuals to understand the format of helpful comments. We should be more transparent about how we use public comments, and we should be creating forums rather than comment sections.”

Other feedback included:

- Asking if there is a way to use other methods of informal comment periods to incorporate more community feedback.
- Highlighting the point of making feedback more impactful to the outcome, as well as expressing concern that that approach might stop communities from being able to lead these conversations.
- The government should be honest and transparent about how it will incorporate any community feedback and comments.

4. DRAFT STATEWIDE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DEFINITION

Co-Chair Mendoza asked for feedback on the draft EJ definition put forward by the EJTF.

Feedback included these points:

- Appreciates the human focus, but we also need to highlight the harm done to ecosystems. Move to be more inclusive in an effort to strike a balance between people and the environment.
- The EPA’s EJ definition is something that people will understand, but how we inform people on how some of these injustices have happened is important. This definition works, but we need to be aware of how we communicate the ‘externalities’.

5. DISCUSSION

Co-Chair Rodriguez asked how the EJTF can improve the community feedback process.

6. NEXT STEPS, REFLECTIONS & HOW TO STAY ENGAGED

Co-Chair Rodriguez let attendees know how to stay engaged through email and meeting attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

Victor Rodriguez, Task Force Co-chair, adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

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