

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearing “Building Back with Justice: Environmental Justice is Central to the American Jobs Plan” July 21, 2021

On January 27th, President Biden issued an [Executive Order](#) expressing his resolve to tackle climate change by creating good jobs and ensuring all agency decisions consider climate impacts.

[Executive Order 14008](#) contained a groundbreaking new policy with the potential to transform how we measure environmental harm and how we share economic opportunity across our country.

Known as the [Justice40 Initiative](#), President Biden has committed to ensuring that the communities most impacted by pollution receive at least 40 percent of the benefits of the Administration’s ambitious infrastructure investments.

President Biden made this goal a key part of the [Build Back Better Plan](#) in order to ensure that climate investments advance racial and economic justice.

And getting this done right will be a key part of this Committee’s agenda, because for the many communities that have waited far too long for progress, this is a matter of life and death.

This is life and death for people in Congresswoman Tlaib’s district in Detroit, where heavy industry and thick congestion have increased asthma hospitalization rates, including in young children.

This is life and death for hundreds of thousands of people in Congresswoman Cori Bush’s district in Missouri, who live with confirmed or suspected exposure to radioactive waste. According to the Government Accountability Office, her constituents may be, quote, “the tip of the iceberg.”

This is also life and death for my constituents, who are plagued by dirty power plants—including the massive Ravenswood Generating Station, which sits next door to the largest public housing development in North America; polluting sites surrounding Baruch Houses, StuyTown, and Peter Cooper Village; and NRG’s fossil gas proposal near the Astoria Houses.

Two of today’s witnesses are environmental justice leaders appointed to the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, which released an excellent list of implementation [recommendations](#) in May.

Among them was a very important piece of common sense: in addition to ensuring 40 percent of our climate and infrastructure investments go to hard-hit communities, we need to make sure that none of these investments hurt these communities. Using some investments to cause pollution, and other funds to stop it, falls far short of what our hardest hit communities need. Children are getting sick. People are dying. We must get this right.

Now it is up to the White House, federal agencies, and Congress to make Justice40 a reality.

Yesterday, the White House released its [Interim Implementation Guidance](#), directing agencies to immediately begin work with OMB to implement [Justice40](#) over the next 150 days.

Agencies are required to deliver clear methodologies for calculating and targeting benefits, as well as reports on the percentage of benefits that actually go to impacted communities.

These reports will convey agencies' progress in tangible improvements, like new wastewater systems in impacted communities.

Importantly, the guidance also establishes a pilot effort that directs 21 programs to go beyond the 40 percent target and work to maximize the benefits directed to impacted communities.

In other words: 40 percent is a floor, not a ceiling.

The Oversight Committee has a key role to play in this and stands ready to work with the White House and community partners to ensure [Justice40](#) is fully implemented in the [Build Back Better](#) climate plan.

As Chairwoman, I will be focusing on several key priorities.

First, [Justice40](#) cannot be isolated in just one agency. We need a whole-of-government approach like the one put forward by President Biden and the White House Environmental Council.

Second, this approach must be guided by frontline voices. Innovative efforts in New York, California, Delaware, South Carolina, and elsewhere provide a roadmap for what is possible.

Third, we need robust federal data about the full extent, or cumulative impact, of climate change and pollution on our communities.

Many of our Committee Members are leading the way with legislation to create cutting-edge environmental justice and data collection tools, to incorporate climate risks and frontline impact into agency planning and congressional projections, and to foster good-paying jobs.

Let me also note that environment justice should not be a partisan issue. Americans in both red and blue states and in both urban and rural communities are struggling with the rising impacts of climate change and pollution, and I am hopeful that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join together to address this crisis.

I thank our remarkable panel for being here today, and I now recognize my friend, and our esteemed Ranking Member, Mr. Comer, for his opening statement.

###

Contact: Emma Dulaney, Deputy Communications Director, (202) 226-5181