



Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition
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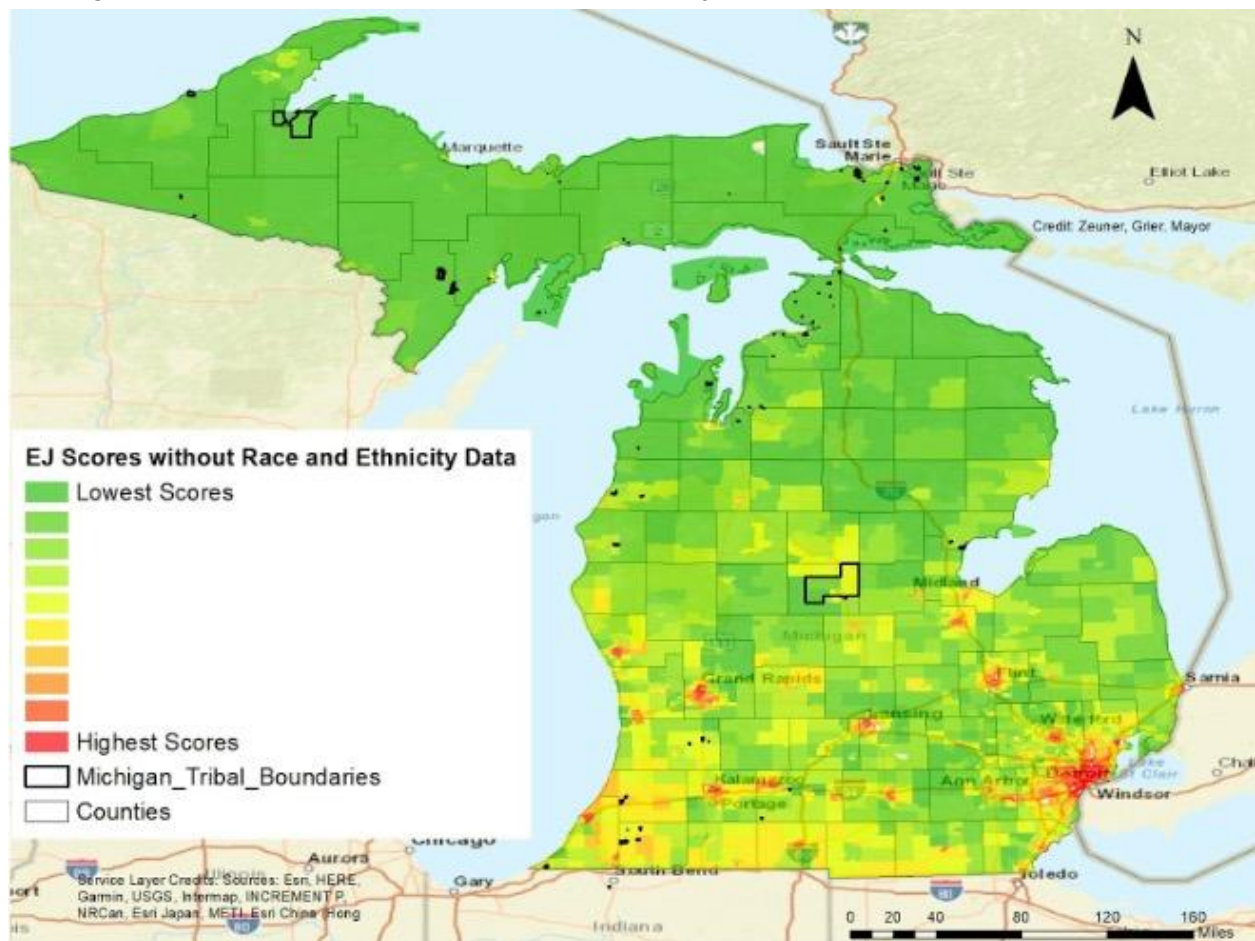
The Honorable Ro Khanna
Chair, Subcommittee on the Environment,
Committee on Oversight and Reform,
U.S. House of Representatives 306 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

On behalf of myself and the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition, I would like to thank you for holding this hearing on advancing the work of environmental justice in frontline communities suffering disproportionate pollution burdens. I would also like to thank Rep. Rashida Tlaib for the invitation to represent Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition's members and constituency. Hearing the voices of impacted communities and those who work alongside them is critical to the policy changes we need to dismantle the deep inequity that exists in current laws and regulations.

This starts with understanding the discriminatory practice of redlining and the root causes of environmental injustice. For example, I was asked to do an exercise where I explained the environmental justice work I do to my ancestors from 100 years ago. I found that it was not all that difficult to explain. Black people are still living in the areas with the poorest air quality, in close proximity to industry, to wastewater treatment facilities and landfills, and still fighting to be treated equally by the law. The fact that the issues from 100 years ago are not all that different is evidence that Black people and so many other people who have been and are discriminated against on the basis of race have been living in a public health crisis for generations. To put it simply, environmental racism is an issue that impacts not just one or two generations but is multigenerational in its reach and its impact is still being seen today.

Our government must address generations of unjust policies and practices that have resulted in environmental racism. Discriminatory social, economic, and political processes have systematically sited polluting activities, including industrial plants and waste disposal facilities as well as combustion-based electricity generation, near communities of color and low-income

people. Similar processes have systematically denied people of color and low-income people access to housing in less exposed locations (Diana et al. 9). Racial segregation and discrimination are a painfully clear reality for the people of Michigan when you look at the proximity of industrial pollution to communities of color. Even though people of color make up 25% of the state's population, they make up 65% of the population that lives within three miles of one of the state's eight hazardous waste facilities (Costley). In 2019, University of Michigan School of Environment And Sustainability in partnership with Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition identifying environmental justice hotspots across the state. The census tracts shown in the map in the figure below are color coded according to their relative ranking with the greenest areas being in the lowest ten percent of all census tracts by environmental justice score and the reddest areas being in the highest ten percent of census tracts by environmental justice score. An overview of the map reveals the relationship between urban areas and higher values for the team's calculated environmental justice scores. Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, Saginaw, and Lansing, show a trend of "hot-spots" of environmental justice.



In the U.S., it is well established that people of color and low-income communities tend to bear disproportionate exposure to air pollution, including co-pollutant emissions from electrical power plants (Ash et al., 2009; Boyce & Pastor, 2013; Richmond-Bryant et al., 2020). Utilizing the EPA's EJScreen tool, the Great Lakes Environmental Law Center's analysis revealed the following information: approximately 119,500 people live within three miles of a

DTE coal-fired generation resource with 38% of those being people of color and approximately 270,500 people live within three miles of a DTE gas-fired generation resource with 54% of those being people of color.

We need policies that reduce pollution and protect our health. We need the cumulative health and environmental impacts considered in permitting decisions. Our neighborhoods are not dumping grounds for greedy corporations. Throughout the State of Michigan Black, Indigenous and people of color are dealing with multivariant vulnerability (i.e. Lead in water, poor air quality, soil contamination). Decision makers should be reducing impact to EJ communities immediately and building a regulatory foundation to help reach our climate targets.

We need early and meaningful community engagement through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The very notion that while environmental justice communities are fighting for their survival of the ongoing climate crisis, a pathway is being created by industry and those who support them to fast track large projects without considerations of alternatives that may be more responsive to the climate crises. Proposed changes to NEPA will likely limit public input, public accountability, government accountability and public access to the courts on the country's largest infrastructure projects where it is necessary to fully consider community and environmental impacts.

These limitations on meaningful public participation and accountability in decision making will directly impair what are likely already disadvantaged communities. The priority should not be profit. The priority should be reducing impact to environmental justice communities immediately and building a foundation to reach our climate targets through equitable solutions.

Environmental justice communities are living with the ills of legacy pollution, redlining, and a regulatory regime that has been created to be blind to the social and health impacts of its decisions. The impacts of climate disruptions plus the crisis of environmental injustice and the policy gaps that facilitate it mean that environmental justice communities once again will bear the brunt of the harm. We should not be sacrificed.

In order to prevent yet another generation of sacrifice zones in our country, we must take swift, bold action to right the wrongs of institutional racism through policy change in the following ways:

We urge Congress to kill Sen. Manchin's 'side deal' which is a bill written by the American Petroleum Institute with no regard for the health and safety of environmental justice communities. The bill seeks to fast track projects that continue to sacrifice environmental justice communities through false solutions like hydrogen and carbon pipelines. These are projects that put Michigan Environmental Justice communities like those living in the shadows of some of the most egregious polluting power plants¹ at the center of these experimental technologies. This side deal, in effect, will gut NEPA and leave already vulnerable communities without the protection they need.

We urge Congress to do everything within their power to protect environmental justice communities' ability to speak for themselves; National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) allows for the early and meaningful participation of communities to weigh in on how a project will impact them. This should not be taken away in the name of expediting projects.

We urge Congress to see that cumulative health and environmental impacts are incorporated into permitting processes. That communities already overburdened by pollution will not be inundated with more pollution, that applications for permits can be denied in such communities.

We urge Congress to move toward mandatory emissions reductions. This will require that Green House Gas (GHG) pollution is reduced. This will drastically improve the health outcomes of environmental justice communities.

We urge Congress to amend and strengthen Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination based on disparate impact, and provide legal remedy for those discriminated against.

¹ Monroe, DTE Fermi 2 Nuclear Power Plant, River Rouge, DTE Coal Fired Power Plant (Closed but being considered for new experimental technologies, Dearborn, Dearborn Industrial Generation Natural Gas Plant,

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