July 27, 2020

Dear Representative:

The undersigned members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition, the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed, and the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition urge you to cosponsor the Environmental Justice For All Act (H.R.5986). Together, our coalitions represent more than 500 organizations across the Chesapeake Bay, Delaware River, and Great Lakes watersheds, which covers more than 370,000 square miles and is home to over 60 million residents across 13 states and the District of Columbia.

In the midst of a public health crisis, the need for clean air and clean water is stronger than ever. It is no coincidence that marginalized communities continue to bear the burden of living in close proximity to hazardous sites, facing higher risk for exposure to toxic chemicals and associated health impacts like asthma and lead poisoning. As our nation grapples with racism, we must recognize that our environmental laws and policies contribute to this never-ending cycle. The Environmental Justice For All Act seeks to break this cycle and would strengthen legal protections to combat environmental injustices. With this bill, people in cities such as Baltimore, Chicago, Trenton, Wilmington, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, could bring statutory claims for damages under common law and request injunctive relief for environmentally caused health crisis events that have severe impacts on children and future generations. It would restore the right for individuals to bring actions under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 against entities engaging in discriminatory practices.

All too often, pollution disproportionately impacts indigenous communities, people of color, and low-income families. This bill would help to protect such communities by requiring the consideration of cumulative impacts in permitting decisions under the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. It would require federal agencies to provide early and meaningful community involvement, including tribal representation, under the National Environmental Policy Act when proposing an action affecting an environmental justice community. Additionally, this bill would establish a fund to use revenues from fees on oil, gas, and coal industries to support communities and workers as they transition away from greenhouse gas-dependent economies.

Furthermore, this bill emphasizes the need for equitable access to the outdoors and nature, which provides countless benefits to underserved communities. Studies show that a thriving environment is invaluable for emotional, mental, and physical health, and Covid-19 has provided a real-world case study of the importance of getting outdoors in a safe and clean environment. This bill would prioritize projects that create access to parks and recreational opportunities in urban areas. This bill would also authorize $75 million annually for grants to support research, education, outreach, development, and implementation of projects to address environmental and public health issues in environmental justice communities.
This legislation would benefit millions of residents in the Chesapeake Bay, Delaware River, and Great Lakes watersheds by ensuring equal protection from harmful and unnecessary exposure to pollutants in the environment. We must act now to undo the burdens that have been placed on marginalized communities suffering from adverse public health impacts. Ignoring the lack of regulation and enforcement of key environmental protections will perpetuate marginalized communities. Thank you for considering cosponsorship of H.R. 5986, the Environmental Justice For All Act.

Please contact Peter J. Marx at peter@choosecleanwater.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Alice Ferguson Foundation
Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Alliance for the Great Lakes
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
American Canoe Association
American Chestnut Land Trust
American Littoral Society
American Rivers
Anacostia Riverkeeper
Anacostia Watershed Society
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Aquashicola/Pohopoco Watershed Conservancy
Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions
Audubon Naturalist Society
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
Baltimore Green Space
Baltimore Tree Trust
Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch Group
Blue Heron Environmental Network
Blue Ridge Watershed Coalition
Blue Water Baltimore
Bucks County Audubon Society
Butternut Valley Alliance
Cacapon Institute
Capital Region Land Conservancy
Chapman Forest Foundation
Chemung River Friends
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Chesapeake Conservancy
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Church Women United in New York State
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Citizens to Conserve and Restore Indian Creek
Clean Fairfax Council
Clean Water Action
Clean Wisconsin
Cleanwater Linganore, Inc
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania
Conserve Wildlife Foundation
Darby Creek Valley Association
Delaware Highlands Conservancy
Delaware Nature Society
Detroit Audubon
Earth Force
Earth Forum of Howard County
Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation
Elks Run Watershed Group
Environers, Inc.
Environment New Jersey
Environmental Integrity Project
Environmental Justice Center of Chestnut Hill United Church
For Love of Water
FracTracker
Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space
Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek
Friends of Quincy Run
Friends of Sligo Creek
Friends of the Bohemia
Friends of the Middle River
Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River
Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Warm Springs Watershed Association
Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore, Inc.
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Watts Branch Watershed Alliance

West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
West Virginia Interfaith Power & Light
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
West Virginia Wilderness Coalition
Western New York Environmental Alliance
Wetlands Watch
Wisconsin Green Muslims