



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS  
117<sup>th</sup> Congress

May 25, 2021

Brenda Mallory  
Chair  
White House Council on Environmental Quality  
730 Jackson Place N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Chair Mallory,

Thank you for the Biden Administration's Executive Order 14008 on January 27, 2021, which established the Justice40 Initiative to deliver 40% of climate investment benefits to disadvantaged communities. This goal clearly shows the administration's commitment to environmental justice by working to address public health and environmental disparities in communities of color and low-income communities historically overburdened by pollution.

As you work to develop an implementation plan for this goal, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus is writing to share our recommendations to ensure the plan is effectively implemented. The Justice40 Initiative has critical implications for the Latino community. Latinos are 165% more likely to live in counties with unhealthy levels of air pollution<sup>1</sup>, and water systems in counties where the proportion of Latinos is in excess of 25% violate drinking water contamination rules at twice the rate of those in the rest of the country<sup>2</sup>.

Our full set of recommendations are below:

**1. Develop a Comprehensive Mapping Tool to identify disadvantaged communities and accurately identify concentrations of pollution overburden.** While the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) EJSCREEN tool is a good start, a mapping tool should be developed specifically for the implementation of the Justice40 goal. This map should

<sup>1</sup> Science Daily, "US Black and Hispanic Minorities Bear Disproportionate Burden from Air Pollution" <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/03/190311152735.htm>, 2019

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, "More than 25m Drink from the Worst US Water Systems, with Latinos Most Exposed" <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/26/worst-us-water-systems-latinos-most-exposed>, 2021

take into account pollution burden, public health indicators, race, the percentage of non-English speakers, income level, and use clear criteria to produce a cumulative score that can be used to identify disadvantaged communities that qualify for targeted climate and environmental investment.

2. **Recognize that not all disadvantaged communities are the same.** It's important that the mapping tool and the implementation of Justice40 recognize there are different needs and community environmental stressors. For example, a community experiencing a lack of Spanish-language resources, gun violence, poor access to health care, and negative health effects from air pollution faces different challenges than a community experiencing a single stressor. The administration's identification of disadvantaged communities must accurately reflect these intersecting injustices so that investments and benefits prioritize dismantling systemic environmental disparities that Latino communities and other communities of color face.
3. **Have an inclusive stakeholder engagement process that includes CHC and Latino advocacy groups.** It's critical to have an inclusive stakeholder process of environmental justice leaders, Hispanic serving institutions, civil rights advocates, and grassroots community members that begins now and is ongoing throughout the implementation of Justice40. This should include development of the mapping tool, and coordination and community outreach within large environmental programs to increase the number of applications for projects that provide benefits to disadvantaged communities. Further, we ask that the CHC be kept up to date on the progress toward reaching the goal, and on opportunities to recommend and include Latino environmental leaders in the process.
4. **Reform existing programs to maximize the benefits and minimize the harms to disadvantaged communities.** Our federal agencies currently run hundreds of formula and grant programs that invest hundreds of billions of dollars annually, and leverage even greater resources. It's important that the administration commit to reviewing every domestic program with a direct or indirect environmental and quality of life link to determine how well it aligns with the Justice40 goal. Beneficial programs should be updated with an equity lens to direct more funding to disadvantaged communities – such as eliminating matching funds requirements in disadvantaged communities for example - and programs with unintended consequences should be reformed.
5. **Create new programs that are built around meeting the Justice40 goal.** As the administration proposes new programs and initiatives to address the multiple challenges our country faces, it's important that they are designed with the Justice40 goal in mind. For example, the new Accelerating Environmental and Economic Justice Initiative that was proposed in the EPA's FY 2022 budget blueprint will overwhelmingly benefit environmental justice communities, including Latinos. Every dollar spent through this initiative will help the administration meet its goal. This prioritization of equity and justice should be a priority whenever possible for newly created programs.
6. **Hold all agencies accountable by measuring benefits and investments in disadvantaged communities, including Latino communities, in a transparent way.**

It's important that the mapping tool you develop is publicly available online, and that the public can review the data behind the map to understand which projects are being funded, where they are funded, and the specific benefits that are being counted toward projects in communities. This should include a breakdown that counts the benefits going to majority Latino disadvantaged communities.

Further, while the Justice40 Initiative is focused on measuring benefits, the tracking and reporting should include data on investments. This can help inform improvements to the initiative over time if there is a strong divergence between the measured investments in disadvantaged communities, the identified benefits, and the outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. We believe the 40% figure in the Justice40 Initiative should be a floor, not a ceiling for increasing investment in Latino communities. We look forward to working in partnership with you to win environmental justice for Latino communities throughout the country.

Sincerely,



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Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Chair  
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



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Second Vice-Chair  
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First-Vice Chair  
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Congressional Hispanic Caucus



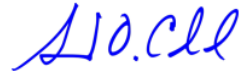
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