

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

We write to demand that you reverse your plans¹ to terminate all U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) environmental justice regional offices and programs. This action would cause extraordinary and disproportionate harm and constitute a complete dereliction of the EPA's statutory responsibility to protect human health and the environment. On February 4, 2025, you released a statement affirming that all Americans deserve access to clean air, water, and land.² You must honor this commitment and reject any effort that weakens public health protections or rolls back decades of EPA's work—under both Republican and Democratic administrations—to support communities unfairly burdened by pollution.

This Administration's relentless attacks on environmental justice programs demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding and hostility toward their purpose and necessity. As defined by the EPA itself, environmental justice means "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of **all people** regardless of race, color, culture, national origin, income, and educational levels with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of protective environmental laws, regulations, and policies."³ The intent is to ensure that every person has clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and has access to a safe, healthy, and sustainable environment free from pollution. This is not about special treatment for any one group; it is about fairness and equitable protection—fundamental American principles that have been ignored for too long in communities across the country that continue to bear the brunt of pollution and environmental harm.

It is well documented⁴ that, for generations, historically disadvantaged communities such as low-income, rural, and communities of color have been systematically exposed to hazardous waste, industrial pollution, and toxic emissions—not by accident, but through deliberate and discriminatory policies⁵ like redlining, segregation, and the creation of "sacrifice zones" concentrated near polluting industries. EPA's regional environmental justice offices were

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-terminates-bidens-environmental-justice-dei-arms-agency>

² <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-administrator-lee-zeldin-announces-epas-powering-great-american-comeback>

³ [https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/ej-2020-glossary_.html#:~:text=or%20indigenous%20peoples-,Environmental%20Justice%20\(EJ\),-%2D%20The%20fair](https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/ej-2020-glossary_.html#:~:text=or%20indigenous%20peoples-,Environmental%20Justice%20(EJ),-%2D%20The%20fair)

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4273903/>

⁵ <https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/envjust/ch2.htm>

established to ensure that Americans in every community receive equal protection under the law, and they engage directly with disadvantaged communities toward that aim, providing technical assistance and connecting them to federal resources for critical remediation efforts, such as replacing lead pipes, installing air quality monitors in pollution hotspots, and taking actions to protect residents from toxic industrial pollution in areas like Pennsylvania's Mon Valley, where corporate negligence and repeated and unabated air quality violations have long jeopardized public health.

Eliminating all of EPA's environmental justice offices would have severe and far-reaching consequences. For over 30 years, communities already shouldering the greatest burden have relied on EPA's environmental justice offices, including the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice—which was initially established as the Office of Environmental Equity in 1992 under President George H.W. Bush—the External Civil Rights Compliance Office, and the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center to hold polluters accountable and secure necessary resources. In 2022, President Biden merged each of these offices into the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights (OEJECR), enhancing the agency's capacity to advance environmental justice and strengthen civil rights enforcement.

Without OEJECR and regional environmental justice offices, the EPA will have limited ability to prevent disadvantaged communities from shouldering the greatest pollution burden, track environmental health disparities, or enforce civil rights protections in environmental policy. According to the American Lung Association, nearly 40 percent of Americans—131.2 million people—live in areas where air pollution exceeds safe levels, leading to higher rates of asthma, heart disease, and premature death. Nearly half of those—70 million—are people of color and are 2.3 times more likely than white Americans to live in communities with failing air quality.⁶ Eliminating these offices weakens that accountability, deepening environmental injustices and undermining the EPA's core mission.

Moreover, the elimination of EPA's environmental justice offices is part of a broader attack on the agency's core mission. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, significant progress was made through the Justice40 Initiative, dedicating 40% of the benefits for most climate, clean energy and other investments from landmark legislation like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to disadvantaged communities. This is without mentioning that the IIJA and IRA were the largest climate investments in human history, equipping communities with unprecedented resources to combat the climate crisis. Rather than building on these efforts, the EPA is dismantling essential programs—firing career experts, canceling projects, and unlawfully withholding funds. Billions of dollars in congressionally appropriated funding have been clawed back or remain frozen despite a statutory deadline of September 30, 2026. Beyond defying congressional intent and likely constituting illegal impoundment, withholding these funds deprives vulnerable communities of the resources needed to clean their water, remediate toxic soil, and address environmental hazards.

⁶ <https://www.lung.org/research/sota/key-findings>

Environmental justice policies have consistently delivered life-saving benefits for all Americans: protecting children from lead poisoning, preventing premature deaths through pollution standards, and expanding economic opportunities. Investing in the most vulnerable among us is an investment in a healthier, more just future for all. These programs should be expanded, not eliminated.

Nonetheless, the EPA's refusal to acknowledge the importance of environmental justice is further underscored by its recent announcement of the "biggest deregulatory action in U.S. history."⁷ This sweeping rollback guts pollution controls on power plants, weakens protections against hazardous air pollutants, removes limits on industrial wastewater contamination, and reverses vehicle emissions standards. These actions represent a deliberate effort to dismantle environmental protections, embolden corporate polluters, and deepen environmental racism. Rather than protecting public health, the EPA seems intent on shielding polluters, leaving vulnerable communities exposed to worsening pollution and environmental devastation.

The American people did not vote for poisoned air, contaminated water, or an EPA that serves corporate interests over public welfare. This is not a partisan issue—clean air and water are fundamental rights. The EPA was established to protect human health and the environment—a mission that cannot be fulfilled while eliminating the very offices and programs dedicated to assisting communities most in need.

We demand the immediate restoration of the EPA's environmental justice offices and programs, along with a firm recommitment to the agency's founding purpose.

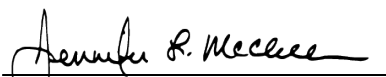
Sincerely,



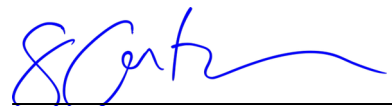
Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress

⁷ <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-launches-biggest-deregulatory-action-us-history>



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Laura Friedman
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Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



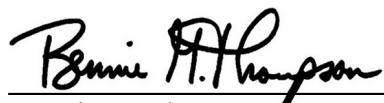
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



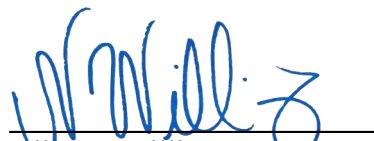
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



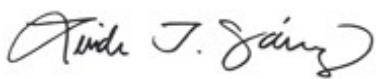
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Troy A. Carter, Sr.
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



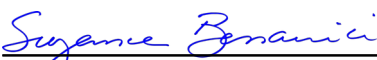
Nydia M. Velázquez
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Valerie P. Foushee
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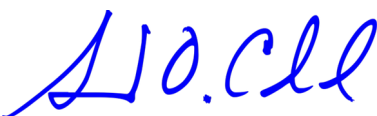
Terri A. Sewell
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Suzanne Bonamici
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Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



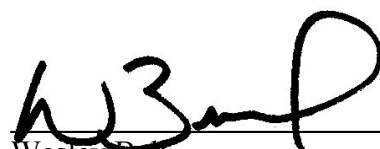
Salud Carbajal
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Gabe Amo
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Andre Carson
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Wesley Bell
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Ro Khanna
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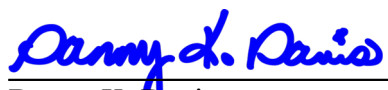
Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Adam Smith
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Danny K. Davis
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Yvette D. Clarke
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Lloyd Doggett
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Maxwell Alejandro Frost
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Jerrold Nadler
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Yassamin Ansari
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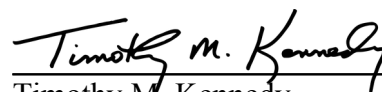
Lucy McBath
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Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
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Timothy M. Kennedy
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Robin L. Kelly
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Shri Thanedar
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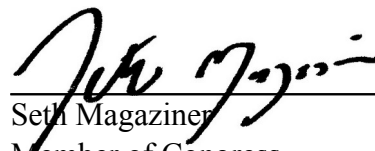
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



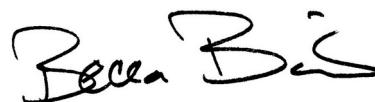
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



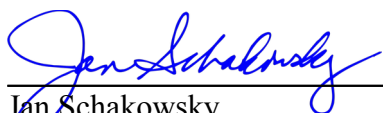
Seth Magaziner
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
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Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



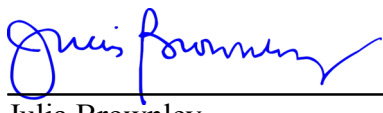
Eric Swalwell
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Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



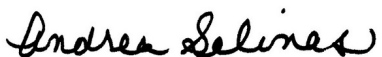
Luz M. Rivas
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Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



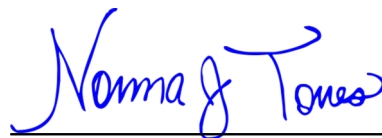
Andrea Salinas
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Kevin Mullin
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Kathy Castor
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Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



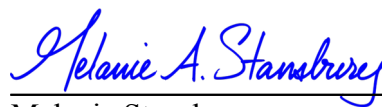
Frederica S. Wilson
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Jasmine Crockett
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Lateefah Simon
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Melanie Stansbury
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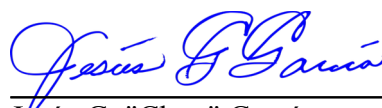
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



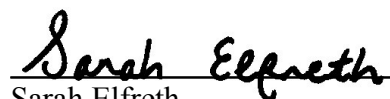
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



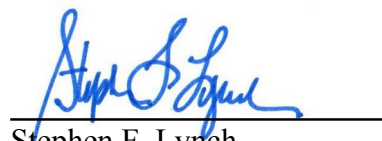
Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress




Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



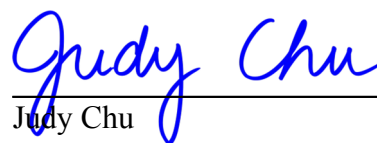
Sarah Elfreth
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Stephen F. Lynch
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MARK TAKANO
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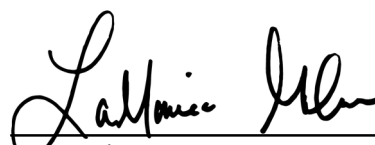
Paul D. Tonko
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Robert J. Menendez
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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LaMonica McIver
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Dan Goldman
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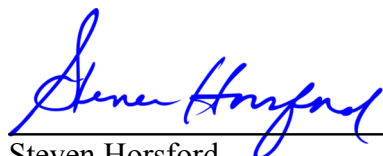
Sara Jacobs
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James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



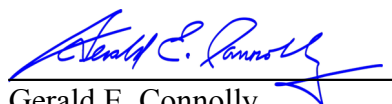
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress
Nevada's Fourth
Congressional District



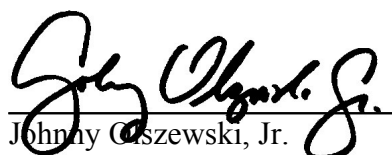
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



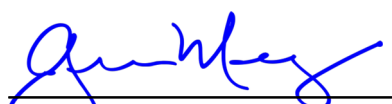
Al Green
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Johnny Ciszewski, Jr.
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Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



George Latimer
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
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Joyce Beatty
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Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress



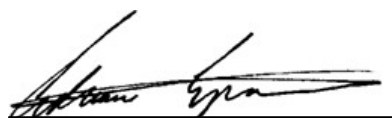
Mary Gay Scanlon
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Maxine Dexter
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Ilhan Omar
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Adriano Espaillat
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Mike Levin
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Haley M. Stevens
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Madeleine Dean
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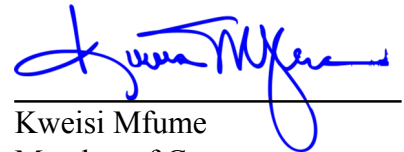
Ayanna Pressley
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Mike Quigley
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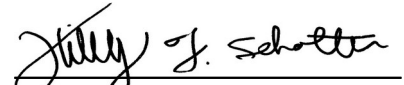
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



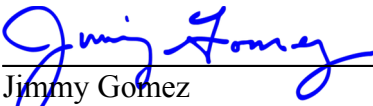
Kweisi Mfume
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Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Hillary J. Scholten
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Jimmy Gomez
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