

**Testimony before the  
Legislative Committee on the Environment  
by Mark A Mitchell MD [mmitch3@gmu.edu](mailto:mmitch3@gmu.edu)  
in support of HB 6551  
AAC Environmental Air Quality**

-March 8, 2021

Good Afternoon Sen. Cohen, Rep. Gresko and members of the Committee. My name is Mark Mitchell. I am a public health and environmental health physician. I am an Associate Professor of Climate Change, Energy, and Environmental Health Equity at George Mason University, where I work remotely from my home in Hartford, CT. I am also the founder and Senior Policy Adviser for Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. I was previously the Director of the Hartford Health Department. In addition, I was the primary author of Connecticut's first Environmental Justice Law in 2009, along with Rep. Jack Hennessey, then CT Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Gina McCarthy and her staff.

I am testifying in support of HB 6551 with some significant modifications. The purpose of the bill is two-part—the first to establish a working group to identify disadvantaged communities for the purposes of carbon and other pollution reduction and investment and the second to put some much needed teeth into the Environmental Justice law.

I have two main concerns with the bill, the first is that it refers to environmental equity when it should be referring to environmental justice. The second is that the environmental justice community

representatives should be allowed to be paid for their contributions. They should not be the only people at these meetings not being paid.

I believe that the 2009 Environmental Justice Law has been fairly successful at doing what it was designed to do—to notify communities about proposals to build new or expand existing facilities that are detrimental to community health and are commonly proposed in already environmentally overburdened communities. Since then, I would suggest that communities are more informed and have more of a say in how facilities are allowed into their communities.

Before the EJ law, the largest predictor of where environmentally risky facilities were being located was the percentage of people of color in the community. Communities suffered disproportionately from the illnesses and causes of death that one would predict from these toxic exposures. I believe that this is still the case, however, but that the rate of growth in the number of these facilities has decreased since the 2009 EJ law. I believe that we need to strengthen the laws and policies to actually decrease the exposure to these facilities and their resultant health effects and to allow DEEP to deny permits based on cumulative exposures.

Through increased notification, the law has brought some measure of equity, but it has failed to provide justice. Merriam Webster defines equity as “freedom from bias or favoritism” and justice as “the assignment of merited rewards or punishments.” We actually need justice to reduce the effects of past government policies to deliberately disinvest and prevent wealth creation and power accumulation in communities of color through redlining and other housing, health, education, labor, environmental and economic policies. That is why the working group should be the Environmental Justice Working Group.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.