



EXECUTIVE ORDER #161

Relating to the Creation of the Office of Environmental Justice

WHEREAS, environmental justice is the principle that all people and communities are entitled to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations and have a right to equitable treatment and meaningful involvement concerning policy and regulatory development, implementation, and enforcement that has the potential to impact the environmental conditions of their community;

WHEREAS, Professor Robert Bullard, who is considered the father of environmental justice, once wrote, "whether by conscious design or institutional neglect, communities of color in urban ghettos, in rural 'poverty pockets,' or on economically impoverished Native American reservations face some of the worst environmental devastation in the nation";

WHEREAS, Civil Rights leaders in the 1960s brought attention to the public health risks associated with the unsafe environmental conditions especially affecting communities of color and low-income communities, laying the foundation for the environmental justice movement;

WHEREAS, environmental pollution is linked to certain chronic illnesses such as asthma and cancer, and in many cases, rates of these illnesses disproportionately affect people living in poverty and communities of color;

WHEREAS, a 2021 report by the United States Environmental Protection Agency found that the impacts of the climate change fall disproportionately on under-resourced communities, and many of these communities lack the resources to prepare for extreme weather conditions;

WHEREAS, in Wisconsin, scientists have concluded that the state's climate is warming, and precipitation and extreme weather events are increasing;

WHEREAS, the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, which brought together a diverse coalition of representatives from agriculture, the business community, Native Nations, utility companies, labor groups, youth, and other industries and communities from across the state to develop recommendations to combat the climate crisis, recommended that the state of Wisconsin create an Office of Environmental Justice to help state government protect the health of its citizens and environment while promoting environmental equity;

WHEREAS, moreover, the state of Wisconsin Clean Energy plan calls for creating an Office of Environmental Justice to facilitate collaboration across state agencies and engage with environmental justice advocates, communities of color, Tribal Nations, and low-income populations;

WHEREAS, the state of Wisconsin needs a principal office to coordinate agency frameworks, strategies, and policymaking to help ensure state action does not have an adverse or disparate environmental effect on communities;

WHEREAS, all Wisconsinites should have the opportunity to participate in environmental decision-making that affects themselves, their families, their health, and their communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TONY EVERS, Governor of the State of Wisconsin, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the Laws of the State, hereby:

- a. Order the Department of Administration to establish the Office of Environmental Justice.
- b. The Office of Environmental Justice shall do the following:
 - i. Consult with the Office of the Governor and state agencies to develop a framework and strategy for environmental justice work across the administration. This should include developing strong public participation strategies to ensure meaningful representation in environmental policymaking, including strategies to overcome linguistic, cultural, institutional, geographic, and other barriers to meaningful participation across the administration;
 - ii. Advise the Office of the Governor and the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy on policies, practices, and specific actions that the state should implement related to environmental justice, including repairing and mediating damage to our environment and natural resources, creating fair access to Wisconsin's natural amenities, and providing opportunities to participate in an economy that works for everyone;
 - iii. Consider relevant public health, industry, and other data concerning the potential for multiple or cumulative exposures in affected populations to human health or environmental hazards, and historical patterns of exposure using the Wisconsin Environmental Equity Tool, among other resources in developing recommendations;
 - iv. Analyze and review what impact state laws, regulations, and policy have on the equitable treatment and protection of communities threatened by environmental harms, including climate change;
 - v. Work with state agencies to facilitate meaningful and timely engagement between the state of Wisconsin and Tribal Nations in Wisconsin on environmental policy and relevant decisions affecting their environment and natural resources;
 - vi. Meet frequently with stakeholders and organizations across the state who represent groups most impacted by climate change and other environmental threats and harms;
 - vii. Partner with the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy, state agencies, industry partners, and community organizations to ensure that the transition to clean energy includes the communities most impacted by climate change;
 - viii. Work with local governments and Tribal Nations on resiliency efforts to take measures to address disaster preparedness aimed particularly at helping the most vulnerable communities; and
 - ix. Engage with the federal government and Wisconsin municipal governments to coordinate and share learned best practices on decision-making with potential impacts on environmental justice communities.

- c. Nothing in this Order should be construed by an agency to require actions that would contradict or run afoul of state or federal law.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great seal of the State of Wisconsin to be affixed. Done at the Indian Community School in the city of Franklin this twenty-second day of April in the year of two thousand twenty-two.

TONY EVERS
Governor

By the Governor:

DOUGLAS LA FOLLETTE
Secretary of State