

S.148 An Act Relating to Environmental Justice in Vermont

Addressing the intersection of pollution, power, and policy

Environmental Justice is a term seldom used in Vermont. The demographics and rural setting of this state can hide environmental injustices in our communities, yet issues of water quality, indoor air quality, energy affordability, transportation access, food insecurity, and associated health risks still disproportionately affect low-income and BIPOC populations in the state. Over the past 5 years, we have heard directly from overburdened and underserved communities to identify shared experiences with unseen environmental justice issues in Vermont. S.148 seeks to build procedural justice into all environmental decision-making.

WHAT DOES S.148 DO?

Sets an Environmental Justice Policy

- ❑ No segment of the population of the State should, because of its racial, cultural, or economic makeup, bear a disproportionate share of environmental benefits or burdens

Defines “Environmental Justice Populations”

- ❑ Based on race, low income, and limited English proficiency

Commits Targeted Spending in EJ Populations

- ❑ Commits the state to spending at least 55 percent of environmental, renewable energy, climate mitigation, transportation, and climate resilience funds in designated EJ populations

Establishes an EJ Advisory Council & Interagency Council

- ❑ Advisory Council comprised of community members from EJ Populations

Commits State to Building an EJ Mapping Tool

- ❑ Tool should be useful to communities and agencies to aid in information sharing

Establishes Date for Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act

- ❑ All State Agencies must develop meaningful Community Engagement Plans and Language Access Plans

Questions? Contact:

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HOW WAS S.148 MADE?

Community-focused groups across Vermont have been organizing for 5 years to inform the creation of S.148.

We believe the environmental movement should be led by the communities who have the most at stake.

We support and rely on community knowledge and expertise to co-construct interventions, policies, and transformative approaches toward building sustainable, just, and resilient futures for overburdened and underserved communities in Vermont.

From 2017-2021 the [REJOICE Project](#) convened impacted community members in order to ask the question: What does Environmental Justice look like in Vermont?

REJOICE held 19 community conversations across the state to answer the following questions:

- What are the key environmental and health issues of concern to frontline communities? How do ethnoculturally diverse and low-income communities identify, prioritize, and integrate health and ecological concerns?
- What are the challenges to access, inclusion, and participation in state environmental and land use policy? How do these challenges contribute to existing environmental health issues?
- What factors contribute to structural racism in Vermont, and thus contribute to environmental justice issues?

Review reports from REJOICE's community conversations by visiting:

www.environmentaljusticevt.org/rejoice

In 2020, [VT Renews BIPoC Council](#) developed definitions for “Environmental Justice” and “Meaningful Participation” included in S.148:

“Environmental justice” means all individuals are afforded the right to equitable access to and distribution of energy and environmental benefits; proportionate distribution of environmental burdens; fair and equitable treatment and meaningful participation in decision-making processes and the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies; and recognition of the unique needs of individuals of all race, color, income, class, ability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity or ancestry, religious belief, or English language proficiency. Environmental justice redresses structural and institutional racism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression that result in the marginalization, degradation, disinvestment, and neglect of Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color. Environmental justice requires prioritizing resources for community revitalization, ecological restoration, resilience planning, and a just recovery to communities most impacted by environmental injustices and natural disasters.

“Meaningful participation” means that all individuals have the right and opportunity to participate in energy, climate change, and environmental decision making, including needs assessments, planning, implementation, compliance and enforcement, and evaluation. “Meaningful participation” also means that indigenous communities and diverse knowledge systems, histories, traditions, languages, and cultures are integrated in decision-making processes; communities are enabled and administratively assisted to participate fully through education and training; and communities are given transparency by the State government with regards to opportunities for community input and are encouraged to develop environmental, energy, and climate change stewardship.

How you can help: [Contact your legislator](#) to ask them to support the passage of S.148!