

October 17, 2022

Ali Zaidi
National Climate Advisor
White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy

Dear Mr Zaidi,

We are writing to congratulate and welcome you to your new role as White House National Climate Advisor. This is a momentous time. Never before has the urgency of climate change and environmental injustice been so great, but neither has the opportunity to truly address the legacy of environmental racism, to transform our economy and society to be just, equitable and pollution-free. We deeply appreciate the commitments the Biden-Harris Administration has made to environmental justice communities to date and the commitments and public statements about environmental justice you have personally made, both in your time with the White House and in your past work with the state of New York. We look forward to working with you to deliver on those promises to our communities and we are prepared to use our full advocacy capacity to ensure that you succeed.

We remain committed to the yet unfilled promises of *Build Back Better*, while acknowledging that some communities can never be rebuilt, but can and must be made whole. While historic investment packages and new programs have been established, communities like Mossville, LA, New Castle, DE, Sivuqaq (Saint Lawrence Island), AK, and Manchester (Houston), TX need to see direct benefits and understand how these investments will result in transformation to their quality of life. To that end, **we request a meeting with you to discuss what we hope is our shared vision for environmental and economic justice.**

The Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform (EJHA) is a national network of grassroots Environmental and Economic Justice organizations and advocates in communities that are disproportionately impacted by toxic chemicals from legacy contamination, ongoing exposure to polluting facilities and health-harming chemicals in household products. EJHA supports a just transition towards safer chemicals and a pollution-free economy that leaves no community or worker behind. The EJHA network model features leadership of, by, and for Environmental Justice groups with support from additional allied groups and individual experts. EJHA works in strategic partnership with the Coming Clean environmental health network, guided by our deep mutual commitment to achieving a just and pollution free world as laid out in the establishment of [Louisville Charter for Safer Chemicals](#).

As you know, the dangerous impacts of toxic pollution, like the impacts of climate change, are not spread out evenly or equitably. Environmental justice communities are disproportionately burdened by pollution and often lack access to things like healthy foods, healthcare and safe outdoor spaces due to disinvestment. President Biden's Justice40 Initiative aims to address this

injustice to “level the playing field” by directing 40% of federal investment benefits to disadvantaged communities.

Within these first two years, this Administration has made commitments to transformational policy goals and set in motion historic investments to benefit EJ communities. Your office and your other federal colleagues have rightly begun to build the infrastructure to deliver on your commitments to “disadvantaged communities”, including the establishment of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, the “Build Back Better” investment agenda, much of which came to fruition in the Inflation Reduction Act, and development of tools to deliver on the Justice 40 Initiative like the Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool. While we applaud much of the work that has gone in so far, we know the real work on implementation remains to be done. As these policies are implemented we need to ensure that they leave no community behind; this includes providing full redress for communities that cannot “build back better” and in some cases can’t build back at all.

EJHA strongly supports the Justice40 Initiative. However, the Executive Order establishing Justice40 and subsequent guidance fail to reference or include any specific provisions for how the Initiative will address relocation for communities that are so heavily burdened by pollution, risk, lack of infrastructure and/or climate change that they are unable to safely remain in their homes.

The historic town of Mossville, Louisiana is a Black community founded in 1790 by formerly enslaved people. Mossville is now surrounded by over 15 plastics and petrochemical manufacturing and refining facilities. A number of current and former Mossville residents suffer from cancer, respiratory issues and other health problems which can be caused, and are undoubtedly exacerbated by elevated levels of pollution in the air and water. Blood-levels of dioxin in Mossville were found to be three times that of the general population.

Many of the remaining community members in Mossville have been advocating for a just relocation for years. Around 2013, SASOL, a South African-owned petrochemical company, announced plans to build the world’s largest ethane cracker and offered a buyout to some residents of Mossville and the nearby town of Brentwood. There is strong evidence to suggest that the handling of the voluntary buyout programs in the two towns was racially discriminatory against the Black residents of Mossville. The company, local, state and the federal authorities have all failed to act in good faith or to enact a just and equitable transition and relocation for the residents of Mossville.

Most residents of Mossville grew up in the area and many have family ties to the community that go back hundreds of years. Unfortunately the conditions in Mossville have become so dire due to cumulative impacts that residents realize they need to get out—and many who are leaving are already sick. Now the Mossville community is experiencing a forced displacement by a combination of existing industrial facilities, new industry—including multiple proposed new LNG

facilities, and climate change impacts. The community lacks basic infrastructure.. Many are unable to move because SASOL is not offering sufficient relocation funds for them to seek equivalent housing elsewhere, let alone provide for their medical needs. **Until there is justice for the people of Mossville, the vision behind the Administration's Justice40 will not have been achieved.**

Mossville is one example of a community left behind by past and current government policies, but there are many others around the country.

Native/Indigenous communities in the Arctic are seeing their subsistence foods contaminated by toxic persistent organic pollutants and disappearing before their eyes. In some areas these Alaska Native communities are seeing their home actually wash into the Bering Sea due to climate change. The Arctic is warming three times as fast as the rest of the planet. This threatens not only their cultural heritage and way of life, but their very survival.

The Manchester area of Houston, TX is bounded by industrial facilities, rail yards, and the approach to the I-610 bridge over the Houston Ship Channel. The neighborhood's only public greenspace, Hartman Park, is across the street from a chemical storage facility. A two-lane overpass over the rail yard is the only evacuation route for residents in case of a disaster at one of the many nearby hazardous facilities. 97% of Harrisburg/Manchester residents are people of color, and 37% of them live in poverty. In at least a couple cases, residents have above ground storage tanks just feet from their homes.

In order to truly deliver on the Administration's equity and justice commitments, Justice40 "benefits" must be defined by the "disadvantaged communities" themselves. Solutions cannot be one size fits all; they must be community driven. In some cases the benefits must be a fair and just relocation. This likely includes 1) adequate compensation for residents 2) healthcare access and/or compensation 3) memorialization of the relocated community's legacy. Ultimately, only impacted communities can decide what equity and justice look like.

Black, Native/Indigenous, Latino, and other communities of color and low-income communities across the country have been intentionally sacrificed as a matter of public policy, not as a coincidence or accident. Mossville and all of these communities need and deserve health, justice, and restitution. The Biden Administration needs to follow through on its commitments to lead a transformation of federal policies and activities to address this toxic legacy; fully heal and restore these communities (or provide them with a just relocation and compensation when that is not possible); and ensure that these harms never happen again.

EJHA, our affiliates, and our partners have recently launched an updated version of the [Louisville Charter for Safer Chemicals](#) which lays out our vision to transform the chemicals management system so it is no longer a source of harm. We believe the revised Charter is deeply complementary to our work on the [Equitable and Just National Climate Platform](#) and we hope

that these two platforms will support this Administration in achieving solutions that actualize our vision of Environmental and Economic Justice for all people.

At its core, the Louisville Charter seeks to build a more inclusive, just, and equitable movement rooted in scientific data, principled partnerships, and policy alignment between environmental justice communities, mainstream environmental and health organizations, workers, and fence-line communities. Community, government, business, and scientific leaders must demand change and insist on comprehensive solutions that leave no community behind.

We imagine every baby born free of harmful chemicals in their bodies, our food and water free of toxic chemicals, our homes and the products used therein free of toxic chemicals, and that these are fundamental human rights. We imagine that good jobs in alternative energy and safer chemicals can benefit local economies. We imagine reversing the devastating effects of climate change that are common across the country and the world, and building an economy powered by renewable energy. We imagine reversing the rising trends of diseases linked to chemicals, and a world free of racial discrimination where fence-line communities, low-income people, people of color, Tribes and Native/Indigenous peoples are not disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals, nor unjustly burdened with the cumulative impacts of exposure to multiple pollutants and health stresses.

EJHA and Coming Clean look forward to meeting with you to discuss how these solutions can best be implemented and how the transformational vision of the Justice40 Initiative can be achieved. We ask to meet in person in Mossville Louisiana in order to truly meet the community where they are. Please have your office reach out to EJHA National Organizer Stephanie Herron at sherron@comingcleaninc.org and Coming Clean Federal Policy Director Maya Nye at mnye@comingcleaninc.org to schedule a time to meet.

Until there is justice for Mossville and communities like it, our vision of a safe, healthy, equitable and just environment has not been achieved. Until there is justice for communities like Mossville your promises to EJ communities will not have been kept. The undersigned organizations stand in solidarity with the people of Mossville, Alaska, Texas and EJ communities around the country who are counting on you to get this right.