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Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services

December 17, 2024

Good afternoon, my name is Ana Parras, and I am the Co- Director of Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services. We work closely with legacy-fenceline communities in Houston, including those in the Harrisburg/Manchester neighborhood, which is 90% Hispanic and 8% African American. Our communities have been enduring the harmful effects of environmental racism for generations, and we are deeply grateful for the work of the WHEJAC in advancing environmental justice issues. The countless hours of time and sacrifice. The many individuals who supported the Councils efforts.

We express our thanks for your leadership in addressing the environmental and health disparities faced by vulnerable communities, particularly those burdened by toxic facilities, chemical plants, and other polluting industries. **These issues are not just about environmental impacts, but about the real human suffering caused by pollution and hazardous waste.** In Harrisburg/Manchester, there are 21 industrial and toxic waste facilities located within just three miles of the community, exacerbating the already significant health risks faced by residents, including high rates of asthma, cancer, and other diseases. **This concentration of pollution, alongside systemic neglect, is a stark example of environmental racism.**

As we reflect on the work of the council, we want to emphasize the importance of considering cumulative impacts in policy decisions. The Interim Framework for Advancing Consideration of Cumulative Impacts is a critical step in the right direction. This framework provides the EPA with the tools to address the compounded environmental, health, and social burdens that communities of color and low-income communities experience daily.

However, it is vital that this framework also fully incorporates **Language Justice** as a central issue. Many of the communities we work with face language barriers that prevent them from fully participating in environmental decision-making processes. Ensuring that information is accessible in multiple languages and culturally appropriate is key to empowering these communities and addressing the cumulative impacts they face.

We also want to stress the importance of centering the lived experiences of these communities in every step of this work. It is not enough to assess cumulative impacts from a distance; we must engage directly with affected communities and amplify their voices, ensuring that their perspectives are incorporated into every aspect of policy and decision-making. **These communities are not just passive recipients of environmental policies; they are active participants and essential leaders in the fight for environmental justice.**

As we move forward, we urge the EPA and future administrations to continue to focus on reducing the disproportionate burdens faced by these communities and to make sure that the goals of improving health, quality of life, and environmental justice are realized in practice. Cumulative impacts cannot be seen as isolated incidents; they must be understood as the totality of environmental, economic, and social factors that create unequal and harmful conditions for vulnerable communities.

Tejas thanks the Council for your leadership and for setting the groundwork to address these critical issues.

Thank you.