

Bill Number: H.R.1553

Bill Sponsor: Rep. Barragan, Nanette Diaz (D-CA-44)

Title of Bill: Empowering and Enforcing Environmental Justice Act of 2025

Current Text: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1553/text>

Status: February 25, 2025 – Referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary.

Summary: To establish an Office of Environmental Justice within the Department of Justice, and for other purposes.

P&A Committee Insights:

- The bill is anticipated to have a positive impact on society by promoting equity and sustainability in environmental governance. It also addresses issues like disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and unequal access to environmental amenities.
- Some worry that the bill could disrupt existing conservation and climate initiatives, potentially halting or cutting short programs that are already making positive contributions.
- The bill primarily focuses on enforcement and accountability, raising questions about its effectiveness in preventing environmental harm in the first place.
- The "Empowering and Enforcing Environmental Justice Act of 2025" is a bill designed to address environmental injustice by focusing on empowering local governments and communities through education and capacity-building.
- The bill's primary goal is to promote equity and sustainability in environmental governance.
- It establishes a permanent DOJ Office of Environmental Justice and requires the Department to update its department-wide Environmental Justice Strategy every five years.
- The bill is expected to have a positive impact by enhancing government efficiency in addressing environmental justice issues and promoting increased public participation.

Position: Support/Watch, we will remain vigilant about how the language of the Bill is being interpreted and to be prepared to reframe support in the event of misinterpretation of the original intent, given the broad nature of the defining terms used in environmental justice.

Priority: High

Subject: environmental justice

Bill to Review: Empowering and Enforcing Environmental Justice Act of 2025 (H.R. 1553)

Leader of bill: Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragan (D-CA-44)

Reviewer: Milagros Rosado Elia

Date: February 25, 2025

Overall Pros	Overall Cons
The bill is anticipated to have a positive impact on society by promoting equity and sustainability in environmental governance. It also addresses issues like disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and unequal access to environmental amenities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some worry that the bill could disrupt existing conservation and climate initiatives, potentially halting or cutting short programs that are already making positive contributions.Focus on Enforcement vs. Prevention:The bill primarily focuses on enforcement and accountability, raising questions about its effectiveness in preventing environmental harm in the first place.

Language Concerns: Some language concerns that might arise, based on typical legislative scrutiny:

- Breadth of the Definition of Environmental Justice: The definition of "environmental justice" in the bill is comprehensive, encompassing not only "disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects" but also "the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers." While aiming for inclusivity, this broad definition could potentially lead to disagreements over what constitutes a valid "environmental justice matter" under the Act.
- Interpretation of "Meaningful Involvement": The bill emphasizes "meaningful involvement" of all people in agency decision-making regarding environmental justice. However, "meaningful involvement" is a subjective term and its interpretation could vary among different stakeholders and communities, potentially leading to challenges in its implementation.
- Determining "Disproportionate and Adverse" Effects: The Act refers to "disproportionate and adverse environmental or human health effects" on certain communities. The language doesn't explicitly define how "disproportionate and adverse" will be determined, which could lead to debates and inconsistencies in applying the definition to specific cases.
- Scope of "Structural or Systemic Barriers": The definition of environmental justice includes hazards related to "the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers." This could potentially broaden the scope of environmental justice matters to include issues that might not be traditionally categorized as environmental concerns, potentially leading to questions about the proper boundaries of the Act.

Reviewer Comments: The "Empowering and Enforcing Environmental Justice Act of 2025" is a bill aimed at addressing environmental injustice by focusing on local government and community empowerment, education, and capacity-building.

The bill's primary goal is to promote equity and sustainability in environmental governance.

It establishes a permanent DOJ Office of Environmental Justice and mandates a Department-wide Environmental Justice Strategy every five years.

The bill is expected to have a positive impact by improving government efficiency in addressing environmental justice issues and increasing public participation.

Recommendation for NAHN Position (Support, Watch, Oppose): I recommend NAHN support this Bill but to remain alert to how the language of the Bill is being interpreted and to be ready to reframe support for indications of misinterpretation of the original intent due to the broad nature of the defining terms used around environmental justice.