

Good morning members of the appropriation committee.

I am June O'Neil, chair of the Board for Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice.

When organizations are seeking funding they often compile a list showing where their city or state stands statistically for a particular interest. These lists highlight negatives by design. The cities and states are not listed alphabetically. Their standing is determined by the negative impact of that designated problem. For example, look at a list for the highest incidents of asthma and you will find that Connecticut is represented in the Top Ten Cities, and Hartford is not far behind.

Dr. Mark Mitchell founded the Hartford Environmental Justice Network in 1998 because he wanted to empower the people of Hartford at the grassroots level to recognize the health problems that were impacting their lives so they would seek policy that would legally change the injustices that surrounded them. These were predominantly low income people of color.

Through HEJN people were educated and encouraged to speak out. They learned that they could come to the Legislative Office Building and tell the law makers what it is like to live their lives with cancer or asthma, for example. They knew what triggered asthma attacks and what needed to be done to eliminate some of the triggers. They knew that people die from asthma. The highest percentage of these deaths happens to black males between the ages of seventeen and twenty four. They know that the Hispanic population has the highest number of asthma attacks that cause emergency room visits. And the white population has alarming statistics also. Many people of all ethnic and racial groups who never had asthma symptoms prior to coming to Hartford soon developed the disease after coming to live here.

Because Connecticut is so negatively represented on the lists Dr. Mitchell soon created branches in Bridgeport and New Haven. The organization became the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. Speaker Bureaus went out into the communities and met at health fairs, schools, churches and talked to individuals about what they were experiencing. They encouraged these people to seek proper medical help. Many people learned that there is a Department of Public Health where they could learn more about their illness and how to find doctors to help them. They learned that they were dealing with something more serious than the common cold. They learned what their triggers were because not everyone has the same reaction to any particular irritant. They learned that they were living in areas where there were more hazardous components such as landfills, incinerators, sewage plants, electric generators, and other sources of pollution. They also learned that they could civilly protest the injustice.

Now the Governor wants to take the Tobacco money and put it into the General Fund. Once that money goes into the General Fund it is gone. Organization such as CCEJ will lose a major source of funding. You cannot, with good conscience, allow this to happen. There is a good reason why that money was designated to be spent as it was. As long as there are people who suffer from asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and lung cancer there is a need for CCEJ to continue to teach them and lead them as we have done for these many years.

Sent from my iPad