

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



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RE: Raised Bill 5103, An Act Requiring an Evaluation of the State's Environmental Justice Law.

Co-chairs Cohen and Demicco and distinguished members of the Committee on Environment,

The Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality offers the following comments on Raised Bill 5103 - An Act Requiring an Evaluation of the State's Environmental Justice Law.

The Council on Environmental Quality (Council) often has advocated for improvements to the environmental conditions in the State's "Environmental Justice Communities". Historically, the Council has also supported efforts to improve transparency and public notice with regard to environmental issues. The provisions of Raised Bill 5103 enhance both of those traditional goals of the Council.

In support of the Bill's intention to improve the conditions in Environmental Justice Communities, the Council offers the following facts regarding the plight of the residents in some of the cities which are included in that category.

According to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, there are over 600 potential pollution sources in each of the state's five major cities: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Stamford and Waterbury. These cities, combined, contain 19 percent of the state's pollution, 20 percent of all potential pollution sources, 51 percent of all the state's population in poverty, and 71 percent of the state's minority population.

Though air quality in the State has improved over the past 15 years, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Justice (EJ) Screening Tool shows these five cities with an average EJ Index percentile for six air quality indicators that are 2-3 times higher than the state and/or national percentile. The residents in these environmental justice communities in Connecticut have hospitalization rates due to asthma that are 2-3 times greater than the average for the rest of the state. Furthermore, a recent national report ranked New Haven (#11) and Hartford (#13) among the top 20 "Asthma Capitols" in the country based on estimated asthma prevalence, emergency department visits due to asthma, and asthma-related fatalities.

The Raised Bill's expansion of conditions under which "Community Environmental Benefit Agreement" is appropriate given the circumstances of these communities.

The topic of Environmental Justice will be explored further in the CEQ's upcoming Annual Report, Environmental Quality in Connecticut 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Hearn
Executive Director