



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 25, 2014

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**Five-year campaign results in victory:
Governor Patrick signs an Executive Order on Environmental Justice**

[Chelsea –November 25] Today, Governor Deval Patrick signed into law an Executive Order on Environmental Justice that directs all state agencies to devote resources to protect the health, safety and environment for the most vulnerable residents of the Commonwealth. The Governor was joined by residents from across Massachusetts who formed the Massachusetts Environmental Justice Alliance (MA EJ Alliance).

“Today we reaffirm our commitment to providing the whole Commonwealth with better quality of life through parks, open space and sound environmental policy,” said Governor Deval Patrick. “This Order will ensure these principles are integrated into decision-making across state government.”

Massachusetts became the eighth state in the country to pass an Executive Order on Environmental Justice. The environmental justice movement began in communities of color more than three decades ago in response to the concentration of hazards, such as power plants and solid waste dumps, in low-income communities and communities of color. Environmental justice (EJ) populations reside in 137 of the Commonwealth's 351 municipalities, including most of the densest cities in towns like Boston, Chelsea, Springfield and Worcester. Residents in these communities, who are mostly low-income and people of color, live with substantially greater risk of exposure to environmental health hazards than the general population.

The MA EJ Alliance is comprised of environmental and social justice organizing and grassroots groups from all parts of the Commonwealth, and is convened by Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE), an environmental justice organization based in Roxbury. For more than two decades, ACE has worked to build the power of low-income communities and communities of color to achieve environmental justice and create healthy and sustainable communities.

“ACE played a key role in bringing together neighborhood groups and community-based organizations to organize for the Executive Order, including convening many dialogues on the issue with the MA EJ Alliance,” said Kalila Barnett, ACE Executive Director. “We appreciate ACE members for taking the lead to fight for this EJ law.”

The campaign for an Executive Order started five years ago when ACE and our partners saw the need for the government to increase its resources to ensure that people can live, learn, work and play in environmentally safe communities.

“A strong environmental justice law will give those of us most affected by pollution a fighting chance in Springfield,” said Michaelann Bewsee of Arise for Social Justice.

The Executive Order is a milestone in the statewide environmental justice movement that is good for our health, our neighborhoods and jobs. It focuses resources on low-income communities and communities of color, and benefits extend to the entire Commonwealth. This Executive Order requires all stakeholders to be creative around our region’s future energy needs, zero waste implementation, and green space and job creation.

“Environmental justice in many states is focused on improving the process or ability of residents and workers to participate in decision-making without guaranteeing that such input will result in practical changes on the ground,” said Staci Rubin, Senior Attorney at ACE. “This Executive Order is unique in that it requires the state to focus enforcement and funding efforts for environmental benefits in environmental justice communities.”

Environmental justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies, and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

“Prior to this order, many siting decisions, patterns of state regulatory enforcement, and funding for improvements were made without government employees recognizing environmental justice issues. We will now have more opportunities to learn about industrial and commercial projects before they enter our neighborhoods and to have a say in the kinds of health and environmental outcomes that we want to see for our families and towns,” added Roseann Bongiovanni, Associate Executive Director of the Chelsea Collaborative.

For New Bedford residents, the Executive Order will “put pressure on local elected officials to become serious about EJ and come up with their own working agenda to make sure that environmental justice is a part of the City’s everyday structure,” said Eddie Johnson, President of Citizens Leading Environmental Action Network (CLEAN). CLEAN is working to remediate the Parker Street Waste Site, a former dump with lingering contamination that is home to many residents, playing fields and schools. According to Johnson, “We at CLEAN are elated” about Governor Patrick’s decision to sign the state law.

The Executive Order will require all state agencies to have an EJ strategy by May 24, 2015. Each strategy must:

- (1) Identify all regulatory authority over industrial operations and commercial facilities and describe how EJ populations are protected;
- (2) Identify funding programs that should consider EJ populations in the award process; and
- (3) Create a public participation plan that focuses agency resources on outreach activities, including communicating in multiple languages and scheduling public meetings at locations and times convenient for neighborhood stakeholders.

The Order will require all secretariats to designate an EJ Coordinator that is responsible for ensuring implementation of each agency's EJ strategy and participate in the interagency workgroup on EJ. The Order will establish an advisory council with community stakeholders to oversee implementation of the EJ Executive Order. Finally, the Order will require the creation of an online environmental justice repository to make it easier for people to learn about the state's environmental justice resources and for developers to visit a central location to learn more.

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