



## STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH *All of God's Creation*

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, May 18, 2025

### *Environmental Justice - PA HB 109*

**Environmental Justice** has been defined as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (*PA Department of Environmental Protection - DEP*). **The DEP has identified 30 characteristics to identify an Environmental Justice Area.** They include environmental factors such as air, water, and ground pollution, and population factors such as health status, race, and income.

Roughly 2.3 million people live in 1,965 identified Environmental Justice Areas across Pennsylvania. People in these communities have historically dealt with disproportionate adverse conditions that can harm their health and overall environment.

Originally named HB 652, the bill was recently amended, including updates to the definition of cumulative environmental impacts, and reintroduced as HB 109 by Representative Greg Vitali, who chairs the Environmental Resources Committee.

**HB 109 will “require known polluting facilities, seeking to build or expand in these sensitive areas, to prepare a cumulative environmental assessment.** It will also empower the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to deny a permit application or require added stipulations for approval if the assessment finds operations would further harm the health and environment of the community.” (Steve Hvozdoich, *Clean Water Action*, 3/7/25)

On April 7th, the House Environment and Natural Resource Protection Committee passed HB 109. **Now the measure needs support to get a vote by the full State House.**

In March, the federal administration “unveiled 31 environmental regulations it is targeting to scale back or eliminate.... This comes alongside executive actions to rescind environmental justice initiatives dating back more than 30 years....

This means more than ever we need to turn to our state elected leaders **to ensure already overburdened communities aren’t being further exposed to hazardous conditions** that poison their water and air, impact their health, and drive down their property values.” (Steve Hvozdoich, *Clean Water Action*, 4/9/25) [Tell your legislators to ACT TODAY by supporting passage of HB 109.](#)

Maurice Sampson II, the Eastern PA Director of the Clean Water Action Fund, echoed the urgency of passing HB 109. At the EcoPhilly Summit in March, he pointed out that **“historically, low-income and communities of color in Pennsylvania have been forced to bear a disproportionate share of adverse environmental impacts** that result in poor health, including cancer and asthma.”

**However, he noted that Environmental Justice Areas are not just black and brown; most affected are white.** Maurice urged people to join him on [Lobby Day at the State Capitol on June 3](#) to urge legislators to step up and act.

Comments on this column may be directed to the Social Justice Committee at [socialjustice@holycrossphl.org](mailto:socialjustice@holycrossphl.org). [Click here for column archive.](#)