

**From:** Nienna

Sent: Sunday, May 28, 2023 9:51 PM

**To:** DOH EPH OEPHS Environmental Justice <[envjustice@ejc.wa.gov](mailto:envjustice@ejc.wa.gov)>

**Subject:** Status of Community Engagement Plan for HEAL Act Implementation

External Email

May 28, 2023

Department of Health

Environmental Justice Council

Washington State

Dear Environmental Justice Council,

I hope this email finds you well. As a concerned mother and resident of Washington, I'm writing to inquire about the status of the community engagement program being implemented in accordance with the HEAL Act. I strongly believe in the importance of safeguarding our environment and ensuring equitable access to a healthy and sustainable future for current and future generations in Washington state, and everywhere.

As a mother, I'm deeply invested in the well-being of my child and future generations. I recognize that the HEAL Act, outlined in Chapter 70A.02 RCW, serves as a critical roadmap for integrating environmental justice into state agencies. It is my understanding that the Act requires seven state agencies, including the Environmental Justice Council, convened by the Department of Health, to develop and adopt community engagement plans by July 1, 2022, to address environmental disparities and uplift the voices of marginalized communities.

I am aware that the HEAL Act emphasizes close collaboration with the Environmental Justice Council, whose members are appointed by the Governor, to provide guidance on community engagement plans. However, I understand that the appointment and seating of the Environmental Justice Council faced some delays, causing the first meeting to be held on April 4, 2022, instead of the initially planned date of January 1, 2022. I'm grateful for the efforts made to establish this Council and the Interagency Work Group, which began drafting community engagement plans in January 2022 while awaiting the Council's full establishment.

In light of these developments, I am eager to learn about the progress made in developing and reviewing the community engagement plan under the HEAL Act. Specifically, I would greatly appreciate an update on the timelines for the review and adoption of the community engagement plan, considering the draft plans have not yet been reviewed by the Environmental Justice Council.

I commend the Department of Health for its commitment to fostering a strong partnership with the Environmental Justice Council in integrating equitable environmental justice into agency activities. Given the duty to the legislature and the people of Washington, I understand that the agency is adopting a provisional community engagement plan.

I'm particularly interested in understanding the steps that will be taken to coordinate this provisional plan with the Environmental Justice Council, incorporating their guidance and insights, as well as gathering input from communities across the state. Furthermore, as tribal consultation is a vital aspect of environmental justice, I am curious to know how the agency plans to ensure meaningful engagement with tribal communities in the process.

In addition, as someone deeply committed to fostering inclusive decision-making processes, I would like to know more about how the agency intends to incorporate public input and feedback into the final community engagement plan. Given the importance of amplifying the voices of communities disproportionately affected by environmental justices, I kindly request details regarding the community listening and feedback sessions that will be conducted, the timeline as updated, as well as the mechanisms in place for tribal consultation.

With the beginning of wildfire & wildfire smoke season upon us, I'm particularly concerned about the health impacts on vulnerable communities. Wildfire events have become increasingly frequent and severe in our state, posing a significant threat to air quality and public health. Therefore, I kindly request information on how the agency's community engagement plan under the HEAL Act addresses the specific challenges posed by wildfire smoke and how community members, especially those disproportionately affected, will be involved in mitigating and responding to these risks.

Finally, I appreciate that the community engagement plan is designed as a living document that will evolve over time. Understanding the importance of ongoing collaboration, I would like to know how the agency plans to partner with the Environmental Justice Council and Washington tribes and other communities in updating and refining the community engagement plan in the years to come.

Thank you for your attention to these inquiries and for the efforts made by the Department of Health, Environmental Justice Council, and Governor Inslee to implement the HEAL Act. Like most Washingtonians, I am dedicated to supporting initiatives that promote environmental justice and create healthier, safer, and more equitable communities for all.

Yours sincerely,

**Nienna Leopardo**