

September 25, 2024

Dear Environmental Justice Council,

The Just Futures project is a collaborative effort focused on creating a more just and equitable future for all Washingtonians, particularly for those who have been historically marginalized. Through partnerships with organizations like the People's Economy Lab, Statewide Poverty Action Network (SPAN), Front and Centered (FC), and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Just Futures is piloting the Frontline Community Assemblies across the state as a tactic of Collaborative Governance. These assemblies will bring together people with shared experiences to co-create solutions that improve and strengthen their communities. **The Frontline Community Assemblies Initiative was made possible by the Environmental Justice Council's recommendation to the legislature to invest in community capacity building and to lift up the voices of those often left out of decision-making processes, giving them a real voice in shaping policies and programs that directly impact their lives.**

We are pleased to see the Environmental Justice Council's continuing interest in funding participatory processes. Participatory budgeting and community assemblies are two tactics of Collaborative Governance. Community Assemblies underway across the state will demonstrate the transformative potential of this model in realigning power to drive systemic change from the ground up. The impact will be tangible; building a governance structure that is more responsive, equitable, and resilient - where public resources are allocated in ways that reflect the true priorities of the people. However, to realize that vision we need a substantial investment, both in the administration of collaborative governance and resources to support implementation of community driven proposals, aligned with the legislature's commitment toward grants that benefit overburdened communities in the operating budget.

To that end, we propose the Council adopt the following as budget recommendations to the Legislature, agencies, and the Governor.

Frontline Community Assemblies

Provide \$5,000,000 for the 2025-2027 biennium to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to build on the Frontline Community Assemblies infrastructure they are currently developing through the Just Future pilots funded this session. These assemblies center historically overburdened communities and involve vulnerable populations and center them in state government policy, program, and funding decision-making processes. Additionally, the continued support of the Economic Justice Team at DSHS is critical in providing administration of pass-through grants and providing technical and other support.

Environmental Justice Fund

Re-appropriate the Fiscal Year 2023-2025 enacted operating appropriation of \$32,600,000 provided solely for "grants that benefit overburdened communities" towards an Environmental Justice Fund, separate and additional to the administration of the Participatory Budgeting program at the Department of Health (DOH). The 2023-2025 operating budget provided the DOH with \$38,600,000 in one-time funding to engage in participatory budgeting with at least five geographically diverse overburdened communities. Of that, \$32,600,000 was explicitly provided solely for grants that benefit overburdened communities, but most of

those funds remain unspent or allocated. We recommend allocating unspent funding, funding for which DOH has not recommended an allocation, at an estimated \$30,000,000 to an Environmental Justice Fund that supports implementation of multiple forms of participatory proposals development. This fund would ideally support capital and operating priorities that can span multiple bienniums, not limited to a single agency's program. A shared fund for community-driven priorities will facilitate timely funding and align with the characteristic participatory budgeting and community assembly approaches

The undersigned organizations include not only project partners, but 2 of 4+ Assembly Anchor organizations supported by state funds, Blue Mountain Action Council (Walla Walla), and Equitable Economic Recovery Alliance (statewide) building on many others doing Community Assemblies, including A. Philp Randolph-Tacoma, Puget Sound Sage, Guanajuatenses, MLK Labor Council, and Seattle Urban League.

Sincerely,

People's Economy Lab

Statewide Poverty Action Network

Front and Centered

Equitable Economic Recovery Alliance

Blue Mountain Action Council