STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT

Introduced By: Senators Euer, McCaffrey, Sosnowski, Kallman, Valverde, Mack, Quezada, Cano, and Coyne

Date Introduced: January 26, 2021

Referred To: Senate Environment & Agriculture

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled “STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT” is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

CHAPTER 17.11

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT

42-17.11-1. Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

(1) "Council" means the coastal resources management council.
(2) "Cumulative impacts" means an exposure, public health or environmental risk, or other effect occurring in a specific geographical area, including from any environmental pollution emitted or released routinely, accidentally, or otherwise, from any source, and assessed based on the combined past, present, and reasonably foreseeable emissions and discharges affecting the geographical area. "Cumulative impacts" shall be evaluated based on any applicable guidance issued by the department.
(3) "Department" means the department of environmental management (DEM).
(4) "Director" means the director of the DEM.
(5) "Division" means the division of statewide planning.
(6) "Environmental justice" means the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, English language proficiency, or income with
respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

(7) "Environmental justice focus area" refers to a neighborhood, community, census tract or other geographically bounded region that meets one or more of the following criteria:

(i) Annual median household income is not more that sixty-five percent (65%) of the statewide annual median household income;

(ii) Minority population is equal to or greater than forty percent (40%) of the population;

(iii) Twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the households lack English language proficiency; or

(iv) Minorities comprise twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in the proposed area does not exceed one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the statewide annual median household income.

(8) "Fair treatment" means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental, or commercial operations or policies.

(9) "Meaningful involvement" means:

(i) That people have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health;

(ii) The public's contribution can influence the regulator agency's decision;

(iii) Community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and

(iv) Decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

(10) "Permit" means any permit, registration, or license issued by the department or council establishing the regulatory and management requirements for a regulated activity as authorized by federal law or state law where there is a possibility of cumulative impacts in an environmental justice focus area, including any consistency determination made by the council.

(11) "Permitted activity" means:

(i) Permitting for any of the following facilities:

(A) Electric generating facility;

(B) Resource recovery facility or incinerator;

(C) Sludge combustor facility or incinerator;

(D) Sewage treatment plant;

(E) Transfer station, recycling center, or other solid waste facility;

(F) Landfill, including, but not limited to, a landfill that accepts ash, construction or
demolition debris, or solid waste;

(G) Medical waste incinerator;

(H) Pyrolysis or gasification facility; or

(ii) Any other activity falling under the regulatory authority of the department or council

that has the possibility of increasing the cumulative impacts in an environmental justice focus area

as defined in this chapter, including, but not limited to, a major source of air pollution, as defined

by the federal "Clean Air Act," 42 U.S.C. § 7401 et seq., or a source of water pollution, as defined


42-17.11-2. List of environmental justice areas.

(a) No later than nine (9) months after the effective date of this chapter, the division shall

propose the designation of environmental justice focus areas in the state. The division shall

periodically, upon the publication of either the federal decennial census or an update to the relevant

state or federal data, propose new designations or the removal thereof.

(b) The chief executive of the division may propose additional designations of an

environmental justice focus area upon the petition of at least ten (10) residents of a geographically

bounded area.

(c) Within six (6) months of any proposed designation or removal of designation, the

division shall:

(1) Prepare and publish a report establishing the justification for its designation or the

removal of its designation.

(2) Transmit the report prepared pursuant to subsection (c)(1) of this section at least thirty

(30) days in advance of the public hearing required pursuant to subsection (c)(3) of this section to

the governing body and clerk of the municipality in which the environmental justice focus area

designation is being considered. The public shall be notified of the proposed change in designation

via publication of notice in a newspaper with statewide circulation and through the division's and

department's websites and through a newspaper, newsletters or other media that specifically focus

on the community near the site.

(3) Organize and conduct a public hearing that provides for the fair treatment and

meaningful participation of the public. The division shall publish public notices of the hearing in a

newspaper with statewide circulation and through the division's and department's websites and

through a newspaper, newsletter and other media that specifically focus on the community near the

site not less than twenty-one (21) days prior to the hearing. When appropriate, the notices shall be

published in Spanish, Portuguese and other languages. At least fourteen (14) days prior to the date

set for such hearing, a copy of the public notice shall be sent to the governing body and the clerk
of the municipality in which the environmental justice focus area designation is being made. At the public hearing, the division shall present its report and take public comment regarding the designation.

(d) No later than thirty (30) days after any public hearing held pursuant to subsection (c)(3) of this section the division shall either make final or rescind its designation of an environmental justice focus area. Such determination shall contain the division's findings and response to the public comment received. The division, when evaluating the designation, shall assess the community support for the designation, as demonstrated through the public hearing conducted pursuant to subsection (c)(3) of this section, letters of support for, or opposition to, the proposed new or expanded facility, and any ordinance or resolution adopted by the governing body of the municipality in which the environmental justice focus area is located. The division shall rescind the designation upon a finding of:

(1) The annual median household income of the proposed area is greater than one hundred twenty-five percent (125%) of the statewide median household income;

(2) A majority of persons age twenty-five (25) and older in the proposed area have a college education;

(3) The proposed area does not bear an unfair burden of environmental pollution; or

(4) It is not supported by the community as demonstrated by the public hearing held pursuant to subsection (c)(3) of this section.

(e) Not later than sixty (60) days after making the designation of an environmental justice focus area final, the governing body of the municipality in which the environmental justice focus area is located, after providing for the fair treatment and meaningful participation of the public, shall designate a representative of the environmental justice focus area.

42-17.11-3. Permit requirements in an environmental justice focus area.

(a) The department and the council shall not approve any permitted activity in an environmental justice focus area or within one-half (1/2) mile of an environmental justice focus area, unless the permit applicant first:

(1) Prepares a report assessing the environmental impact of the proposed permitted activity, including any cumulative impacts on the environmental justice focus area, any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the permit be granted, and the public health impact on the environmental justice focus area of the proposed permitted activity;

(2) Transmits the report required to be prepared pursuant to subsection (a)(1) of this section at least thirty (30) days in advance of the public hearing required pursuant to subsection (a)(3) of this section to the department or council, the governing body and the clerk of the municipality in
which the environmental justice focus area is located, and the designated representative of the
environmental justice focus area. The report shall be made available to the public at least thirty (30)
days prior to the public hearing required pursuant to subsection (a)(3) of this section;

(3) Organizes and conducts a public hearing that provides for the fair treatment and
meaningful involvement of the public. The permit applicant shall publish public notices of the
hearing in a newspaper with statewide circulation and through the department's website and through
a newspaper, newsletters and other media that specifically focus on the community near the site
not less than twenty-one (21) days prior to the hearing. When appropriate, the notices shall be
published in Spanish, Portuguese or other languages. At least fourteen (14) days prior to the date
set for such hearing, a copy of the public notice shall be sent to the department or the council, the
governing body and the clerk of the municipality in which the environmental justice focus area is
located, and the designated representative of the environmental justice focus area. At the public
hearing, the permit applicant shall provide clear, accurate, and complete information about the
proposed permitted activity and the potential environmental and health impacts of the permitted
activity. Following the public hearing, the director or designee shall consider the testimony
presented and evaluate any revisions or conditions to the permit that may be necessary to reduce
the adverse impact to the public health or to the environment in environmental justice focus area.

(b) The department or council shall not issue a decision on the permit application until at
least forty-five (45) days after the public hearing held pursuant to this section. Notwithstanding the
provisions of any other law, or rule or regulation adopted pursuant thereto, to the contrary, the
department or council may deny a permit application in an environmental justice focus area upon
a finding that the approval of the permit would, together with the cumulative impacts posed by the
existing conditions, including conditions resulting from already permitted activities, in the
environmental justice focus area, constitute an unreasonable risk to the health of the residents of
the environmental justice focus area or to the environment in the environmental justice focus area.

(c) The department or council, when evaluating an application for a permit pursuant to this
section, shall assess the community support for the proposed permitted activity, as demonstrated
through the public hearing conducted pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, letters of support
for, or opposition to, the proposed permitted activity, and any ordinance or resolution adopted by
the governing body of the municipality in which the environmental justice focus area is located.
The department shall consider community support, or the lack thereof, in its decision to grant or
deny a permit.

(d) If a permit applicant is applying for more than one permit for a proposed permitted
activity, the permit applicant shall only be required to comply with the provisions of this section
once for the same facility in the same location, unless the department, in its discretion, determines
that more than one public hearing is necessary due to the complexity of the proposed permitted
activity. Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of the department to hold
or require additional public hearings.

42-17.11-4. Implementation.

(a) The department and council may adopt rules and regulations to implement the
provisions of this chapter.

(b) The department may issue guidance on how to evaluate cumulative impacts pursuant §
42-17.11-3(a)(1). The department shall publish the guidance document on its website.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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LC000608/SUB A
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EXPLANATION

BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

OF

AN ACT

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT

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1 This act would require the division of statewide planning to create a list of environmental justice areas. Once the list of environmental justice areas is adopted the act would establish requirements which would have to be met by an applicant prior to division of statewide planning or the coastal resources management council issuing permits for an activity that would increase cumulative impacts on an environmental justice area.

6 This act would take effect upon passage.

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