

**June 1, 2022**

**TO:** Delegate Mark Keam and Senator Ghazala Hashmi

**CC:** Virginia Legislative Black Caucus

Dear Delegate Keam and Senator Hashmi,

We write to inform you about a proposed mega-landfill project in Cumberland County, Virginia named the Green Ridge Recycling and Disposal Facility and how its approval would be in direct violation of the Virginia Environmental Justice Act of 2020.

Members of the Health Equality Network (HEN) coalition, including National Newspapers Publishers Association CEO Dr. Ben Chavis, Virginia Frederick Douglass Foundation President J.R. Gurley, Southern Christian Leadership VA Chapter, Black Women's Health Imperative, and former Congress Ed Towns, have joined to support the local residents of Cumberland County to express our appreciation for your efforts to establish this critical Act and champion its core principles of environmental justice. As original sponsors of this landmark legislation, our coalition felt it paramount that you be made aware **the integrity of the Environmental Justice Act is in jeopardy**, and thousands of vulnerable Virginians will suffer if this project is not rejected.

The [Virginia Department of Environmental Quality \(DEQ\)](#) is currently reviewing the proposal for this new 1,200 acre mega-landfill, set to be built in Cumberland County, a historically marginalized region of our Commonwealth with [more than 30% of its population being Black](#). This mega-landfill plans to operate 24 hours a day, six days a week, and add 500 daily tractor-trailers to local roads. Its presence will jeopardize the air quality and clean water access for the roughly 10,000 residents of Cumberland County. Not only would the mega-landfill harm the community's health, but it would also be built next to the Pine Grove Elementary School, a historical landmark built in 1917 and [a symbol of the generational challenges that Black communities have overcome](#) since the Jim Crow Era.

Clearly, the construction of the Green Ridge mega-landfill violates the core pillars of the Environmental Justice Act, which [emphasizes](#): "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of every person, regardless of race, color, national origin, income, faith, or disability, regarding the development, implementation, or enforcement of any environmental law, regulation, or policy."

The approval of such a threatening project must be prevented to uphold this landmark law and protect Virginians from suffering disproportionate effects at the hands of corporate greed.

Virginians have readily and consistently expressed their concerns about this proposed mega-landfill. As part of the review process, the DEQ recently held [a public information meeting](#) in Cumberland County to provide locals a chance to engage with regulators and decision makers. Unsurprisingly, a number of residents expressed their concerns about the mega-landfill's detrimental effects on their wellbeing, including pollution of their private water wells, worsened air quality and unsafe pedestrian routes due to increased oversized traffic, and other health-related consequences. In other words, Virginians fear the Green Ridge mega-landfill flies in the face of environmental justice, a concept that you have helped legislate into law.

As the Environmental Justice Act was only recently passed in 2020, there remains uncertainty as to how the Commonwealth should implement the law. We believe the time is now for this landmark legislation

to serve its intended purpose and protect Virginians from corporate projects that do not treat them fairly based on who they are or where they live.

As champions of this law, **we urge you to hold a hearing on the implementation and enforcement of the Virginia Environmental Justice Act as it pertains to proposals like the Green Ridge mega-landfill.** We must stand up for Virginians in all communities to ensure equitable health and prosperity.

Please see the attached opinion piece that ran in the [Washington Post](#) this week highlighting these concerns. **We welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue in greater detail with you.**

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

The Healthcare Equality Network

