

Chair Brenda Mallory
White House Council on Environmental Quality
1650 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20501

March 22, 2023

Dear Chair Brenda Mallory,

As the country that has emitted more emissions than any other, the US has the most responsibility for tackling the climate crisis. The carbon footprint of the world's one billion poorest people represents just 3 percent of the global total. The climate crisis continues to wreak havoc on the poorest communities around the world, while rich countries, corporations, and financiers of polluting industries actively perpetuate the crisis by allowing, or even incentivizing, increased emissions.

The Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to environmental justice and equality is an opportunity to usher in support and harness momentum to ensure Federal environmental reviews and permitting processes are effective, efficient, and transparent. These reviews must be guided by the best available science to promote positive environmental and community outcomes, and shaped by early and meaningful public engagement. The latest guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Guidance on Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change elevates this bedrock environmental safeguard and reaffirms the federal government's commitment to communities historically undermined and marginalized in this country.

For almost half a century, NEPA and its application has been an avenue to ensure the federal government carefully considers the impacts of its actions and that communities have a voice in what gets built in their neighborhoods. Americans, especially communities of color, have long depended on NEPA to be heard in decisions that have a profound impact on their health and their well-being. This standard-bearing legislation has been a tool to ensure justice domestically and is an example in implementing safeguarding principles around the world. This is particularly important as we seek to realize a just energy transition: one that ends the era of fossil fuels and ushers in an era where care of community is prioritized over corporate greed. The need for just energy transition is also an issue of gender equity: the impacts of fossil fuel pollution on pregnant people and the continued horror stories of violence against Indigenous women near infrastructure projects are just a few examples of the need to create a new feminist future that centers gender, racial, and economic justice and the voices of those most impacted by climate and environmental harms. The US's continued reliance on fossil fuels and attempts to push through these and other dangerous projects by weakening NEPA is not in line with the Biden administration's commitments to gender equity, racial justice, or climate action.

Reestablishing NEPA safeguards and ensuring the U.S. Federal Government considers the climate and environmental justice impacts of industrial projects is a crucial step to empowering frontline communities. NEPA is not the ceiling but the floor - and as we seek to address current and historic environmental injustice, build capacity in disproportionately burdened communities, and promote collaborative problem-solving for issues involving environmental justice, protecting and mainstreaming NEPA and its principles across the entirety of the Federal government will be crucial to advancing environmental justice in this country.

On behalf of almost 22,000 Oxfam supporters (see attached), we urge your office to promote US policy that responds to the needs of the most impacted communities, both at home and abroad. In addition to being a crucial tool for environmental justice in the US, as the Biden administration seeks to be a climate leader on the global stage, we must remember that NEPA has been seen as a model law to support community engagement and environmental

safeguarding around the world, and the actions we take to reaffirm its role in promoting justice can have ripple effects. NEPA is a crucial part of our toolbox to shift the power paradigm towards a more equitable future.

We look forward to working alongside CEQ's team of technical and policy experts and our coalition of like minded partners in the future to ensure NEPA's success and protection.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abby Maxman', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Abby Maxman