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HOUSE BILL NO. 2030

Offered January 13, 2025

Prefiled January 7, 2025

A BILL to establish the Environmental Justice Task Force to further environmental justice in the Commonwealth; report.

Patron—Anthony

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. § 1. There is hereby established the Environmental Justice Task Force (the Task Force) for the purpose of furthering environmental justice, as defined in § 2.2-2699.8 of the Code of Virginia, in the Commonwealth. The Task Force shall consist of appointees from each of the following agencies: the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Emergency Management, Department of Energy, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Health, Department of Transportation, State Corporation Commission, and Virginia Economic Development Partnership. The Task Force shall require agencies within the Task Force to work with an independent consultant to analyze and report the environmental justice practices and policies of such agencies. The Department of Environmental Quality's Office of Environmental Justice shall oversee the development of such independent environmental justice reports. The Task Force shall:

1. Meet with residents of the Commonwealth, representatives from impacted communities, social justice organizations, consumer protection organizations, and representatives from local governments and make recommendations to the Governor to address concerns raised by such residents and organizations.

2. Make recommendations to the Governor to address concerns raised by the independent environmental justice reports completed by the agencies of the Task Force.

3. Recommend policies to require all state agencies and to encourage relevant federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to conduct cumulative environmental and health impact assessments that provide an analysis of historical environmental burdens, such as industrial pollution and long-term health effects, including respiratory illnesses or cancer rates, in historically economically disadvantaged communities, as defined in § 56-576 of the Code of Virginia, for proposed infrastructure projects that may affect such communities. Such policy shall also include an assessment to evaluate the combined effects of pollution, climate risks, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

4. Develop standard quality environmental justice metrics to evaluate (i) social, environmental, and health outcomes for historically economically disadvantaged communities, (ii) long-term climate resilience, and (iii) equitable distribution of economic benefits from projects that shall be used by all state agencies and encouraged to be used by federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, when conducting a cost-benefit analysis for infrastructure projects in the Commonwealth.

5. Evaluate whether projects undertaken by state agencies and reviewed by the Task Force are aligned with Justice40 initiatives, established by Executive Order 14008 (2021) and ensure that no less than 40 percent of the direct benefits of such projects flow to historically economically disadvantaged communities identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool.

6. Establish regional advisory panels consisting of representatives from the community and social justice organizations, which shall include an environmental expert. Such advisory panels shall evaluate the planning, assessment, and execution stages of a state or federal infrastructure project and provide recommendations to such stage agency or federal agency to ensure priorities of the community in which such project is located, including priorities that meet the needs of historically economically disadvantaged communities, are incorporated into such projects.

7. Require a report from state agencies and encourage a report from federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, describing how environmental justice outcomes have been achieved in projects under its purview.

8. Conduct independent environmental justice impact reviews, subject to the availability of funds, for all state infrastructure projects that affect historically economically disadvantaged communities to assess the short-term and long-term impacts on environmental, health, and social equity and provide recommendations to mitigate any potential harms and ensure compliance with environmental justice goals.

9. Advise the Governor and state agencies on environmental justice issues.

§ 2. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Task Force upon request. The Task Force shall report its findings and conclusions to the Governor and the General Assembly no later than November 1, 2027, and annually thereafter. Such report shall be submitted as a report document as provided

59 *in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative*
60 *documents and reports and shall be made publicly available on the General Assembly's website. Prior to*
61 *submitting the annual report to the Governor and General Assembly, the Task Force shall transmit a final*
62 *draft of the report to the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice and request the Council to provide*
63 *written comments.*