

The Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act of 2021

Lead Sponsors: Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), Congressman A. Donald McEachin (VA-04)

Background

As a result of [decades of discrimination](#), low-income communities, communities of color, and Indigenous communities are significantly more likely to suffer sickness and death from high levels of air pollution, contaminated drinking water, close [proximity to toxic waste](#) sites, and other legacy pollution. In order for these communities to fully share in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress must address this historic injustice. The Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act (EJLPA) will immediately invest \$200 billion to clean up this legacy pollution. The bill will:

Cleanup Toxic and Hazardous Waste

- ❖ 24% of all households below the poverty level and 28% of all people of color live [within three miles](#) of the most [dangerous](#) Superfund sites. And despite making up only 39.6% of the general population, people of color represent nearly 50% of the population living within one mile of a Superfund site. This bill's provision of **\$10 billion** to the EPA Superfund National Priorities List will accelerate the cleanup of these toxic sites and help clear the largest backlog of unfunded sites since 2004.
- ❖ Abandoned coal mines pose a [significant risk](#) to public health. The EJLPA provides **\$10 billion** to the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund, an investment that would fund the reclamation of thousands of eligible abandoned mine lands sites.
- ❖ Abandoned hard rock mines, including uranium mines, also pose a significant risk to public health. Approximately [600,000](#) Native Americans live within six miles of an abandoned mine. With priority given to sites located on tribal land, this bill dedicates **\$10 billion** to the Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Program to remediate abandoned hard rock mines.
- ❖ Contaminated sites that are not safe for public or commercial use, known as 'brownfields,' are located [disproportionately](#) in communities of color. This bill would provide **\$3 billion for grants** to remediate brownfield sites. Such remediation efforts are a [major boon](#) to economically depressed communities, producing roughly \$20 in economic benefits for every \$1 spent.
- ❖ There are [over 1,700](#) formerly used military sites that contain hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste, which pose a threat to drinking water and public health. This bill, which provides **\$10 billion** to the Formerly Used Defense Sites Program will clean up [90%](#) of these sites. The EJLPA also commits **\$3 billion** to the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program, which will remediate tens of thousands of acres of formerly radioactive land and return hundreds of properties back to public use.

Improve Air Quality

- ❖ Diesel [engine exhaust](#) increases people's risk for cancer, [respiratory illness](#), and heart disease, and even [reduces cognitive performance](#) in children. [Studies](#) show that the 25 million children who ride diesel school buses breathe air that can be several times more polluted than the outside air —

something that disproportionately affects children in low-income and working class households, who are [more likely](#) to take the bus. The EJLPA includes **\$30 billion** to replace over 50% of diesel school buses with zero emission school buses in the most disadvantaged school districts.

- ❖ Decades of discriminatory practices in urban planning have left communities of color with [deficiencies](#) in green spaces and tree canopy cover — a crucial line of defense against [heat waves](#), air pollution, and [flooding](#). The EJLPA commits **\$25 billion** to urban tree planting initiatives, an investment that will plant an estimated 100 million trees in low-income communities.

Address Lead, Clean Water, and Sanitation Issues

- ❖ Childhood lead poisoning continues [to cause](#) irreversible brain damage and other life-threatening health conditions, [particularly](#) in low-income communities and communities of color. This bill will inject **\$45 billion** into a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant program to remediate lead-based paint hazards in housing, the [leading cause](#) of childhood lead poisoning in the United States. This funding would eliminate lead based paint hazards in nearly 4 million low income households.
- ❖ [23%](#) of Native American homes have at least one dangerous issue, such as lead paint, mold, or poor ventilation. This bill provides **\$1 billion** for grants to tribal governments to address housing-related safety hazards.
- ❖ Lead Service Lines (LSLs) supply water for [15-22 million Americans](#), a population that [disproportionately](#) contains low-income communities and [communities of color](#). The EJLPA will provide **\$45 billion** in funding to replace every lead service line in the country.
- ❖ Nearly [2 million](#) Americans lack access to adequate plumbing or sanitation, with African Americans and Latinos [twice as likely](#) to lack basic access. This bill commits **\$10 billion** in funding to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Decentralized Water Systems Program, which will give nonprofits capacity to provide grants to over 660,000 homes to construct or improve individual household water well and wastewater systems.
- ❖ Native Americans are [19 times](#) more likely than whites to lack access to basic indoor plumbing (including running water and flushable toilets) — more than any other demographic group. By providing **\$3 billion** to the Indian Health Service (IHS) to build and renovate sanitation infrastructure, this bill will bring safe drinking water and adequate sewage systems to [every](#) American Indian and Alaskan Native household.
- ❖ [850+ cities](#) across the United States collect rainwater, industrial waste, and domestic sewage in combined sewer systems, which overflow during heavy rainfall or snowmelt and discharge untreated sewage into people's basements, parks and waterways. [These overflows](#) expose people to dangerous diseases, make rivers/lakes unsafe to use, and impose [burdensome](#) cleanup costs on low income households and environmental justice communities. The EJPLA provides **\$25 billion** to the EPA to address combined sewer overflows, which will eliminate most overflow problems in economically distressed communities.