



Acting PA DEP Secretary Discusses Broad Views on Environmental Justice and Plans for Additional EJ Staff

On March 23, 2023, Acting Pennsylvania DEP Secretary Richard Negrin spoke at length about his views on environmental justice (EJ) during the House Appropriations Committee hearing on DEP's FY 2023-24 budget request. Among other things, Acting Secretary Negrin discussed the importance of taking an expansive approach to environmental justice (EJ), noting that in the past, EJ issues were framed in terms of race, and impacts on communities of color. While he acknowledged that systemic racism and discussions about race are an important part of EJ, he stated that EJ "is not just an issue for those of us who are people of color. It's an issue for the poor and rural" as well. Specifically, Acting Secretary Negrin mentioned that he considers residents near the site of the Norfolk Southern train derailment, and residents impacted by a leaking abandoned natural gas well outside of Pittsburgh, to be EJ communities. As he noted, this is a broader interpretation of EJ than the Biden administration has espoused.

Acting Secretary Negrin also announced that he had named Fernando Treviño to the new position of Special Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice. According to Acting Secretary Negrin, Mr. Treviño has acted as a "community engagement professional" for a number of years, last serving as the Regional Political Director for the National Democratic Redistricting Committee. Previously, Mr. Treviño served as the Deputy Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs in Philadelphia. Mr. Treviño graduated from the UANL School of Law in Mexico, and later received a Certificate on International and Comparative Law from Temple University's law school. Mr. Treviño will be supported by additional EJ staff in DEP offices throughout the Commonwealth. Acting Secretary Negrin indicated that he plans to place an EJ coordinator within "every single regional office of DEP across the entire state, in six of our offices, full-time employees." Two coordinators will serve as "floaters," tasked with targeted outreach to the Asian and Latino communities, respectively.

The Acting Secretary's comments are all in accordance with the Commonwealth's efforts to bolster its EJ efforts over the last several years. Starting in 2021 with Governor Tom Wolf's adoption of an executive order formally establishing the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) within DEP, to today, as DEP works to update the state's existing 2004 EJ Policy, EJ issues continue to be a priority for DEP. With the Biden administration steadily funding EJ grant programs for state governments and community groups, this trend shows no sign of subsiding (see Babst Calland's recent [article in PIOGA](#) regarding EJ for more details).

Babst Calland's energy and environmental attorneys continue to track environmental justice developments and their implications for industry.

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