



June 15, 2022

Mayor Sarmiento and Council

20 Civic Center Plaza

Santa Ana

CA 92701

Via Email

RE: Climate Action Campaign Urges Santa Ana to Fund Environmental Justice Staff

Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers,

Thank you for your leadership as climate justice champions through your decisions to include over 50 plans and policies in the City of Santa Ana's General Plan update, and for passing the Climate and Public Health Emergency Resolution this past year. As you consider the 2022-23 budget, we urge the city of Santa Ana to prioritize funding for an environmental justice staffer in the 2022-2023 budget.

Climate Action Campaign is a non-profit climate and environmental organization based in Orange County and San Diego with a simple mission: stop the climate crisis through effective and equitable policy action.

Providing funding for staff to carry out environmental justice projects in the general plan are in alignment with climate science and community needs, and if implemented, would help protect public health, address environmental injustice, and make us climate-safe.

Santa Ana has committed to bold and necessary goals within its General Plan by including environmental justice or environmental justice-focused equity policies throughout the community, mobility, economic development, public service, and conservation elements. One of the primary implementation strategies advocated for by community members and laid out in the General Plan to accomplish these goals, is to hire an environmental justice staffer who works full-time on implementing environmental justice policy and doing community outreach to those most impacted. In item 3.9 of the General Plan Community Element's Implementation section, this staff position is described as being added to the city manager's office in 2022. However, it is concerning that despite these commitments, and the timeline in the General Plan, funding for this position is not included in the 2022-2023 budget.

Because the community has advocated for these environmental justice policies for more than 2 years, and because Santa Ana is one of OC's largest cities yet has extremely limited staff capacity to do environmental justice work, the addition of this position is critical. We urge you take this step to enable Santa Ana to begin to address environmental injustice and meet your commitments by doing the following:

1. Add funding for the EJ staff position to the 2022-2023 budget
2. Make applying for EJ grants a main responsibility of the new administrative secretary role being added to the city manager's office. This action is appropriate as this position is already intended to build staff capacity. This way, even if the EJ staff position cannot be funded through the budget this fiscal year, it will be added by the end of 2022, which will allow the city to begin to focus on environmental injustices and keep on track with the General Plan timeline.

By funding this position, the city can fulfill its commitment to prioritize community safety and welfare by addressing environmental injustices. If this position is not funded through the pathways recommended above, the city will continue to be among the least climate ready, environmental justice communities and advocates will have had their voices effectively silenced, and there will be major public health implications.

Santa Ana is the Least Climate Ready but Most Impacted OC City

In a study by the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, Santa Ana ranked as the city [most at risk of climate impacts and yet one of the least prepared](#). Santa Ana residents are already experiencing the impact of the pollution that causes climate change and climate impacts.

CalEPA also identified Santa Ana as being home to some of the most polluted neighborhoods in all of California through the CalEnviro scoring tool, which shows that [24 Santa Ana census tracts](#) are in the top 25% for environmental pollution, with one neighborhood experiencing more pollution than 99% of all other neighborhoods in California. Santa Ana residents have the right to clean, healthy neighborhoods, and by hiring an environmental justice staffer, you can begin to make this a reality for all residents. As climate impacts continue to worsen, having an environmental justice staffer to do community outreach and equitably create climate policy will become even more crucial.

The Silencing of Environmental Justice Communities and Advocates

For the past two years, community members have repeatedly shown up for city council meetings demanding the inclusion of environmental justice policy in the General Plan. Hundreds of residents and many community organizations such as MPNA Green, OCEJ, Rise Up Willowick, THRIVE, UCI researchers, Climate Action Campaign and Stand.Earth shared their experiences of injustice and the need for policies that protect them, their families, and their futures. By not funding an environmental justice staffer to carry out these policies and engage with the community, the city is disregarding the time, effort, and experiences of injustice of the community members who advocated for these policies. Activists have been told time and time again that city staff currently has no capacity for additional but necessary environmental justice and related community

outreach work. A decision not to fund this position effectively silences and sidelines the work done by community members and advocates around EJ policy.

The Health Implications of Environmental Justice Delay

Every day, Santa Ana residents are exposed to pollution from air, water and soil which has massive impacts on their health and safety. Air pollution, for example, has been [linked to](#) respiratory diseases like asthma, cardiovascular disease, and birth defects like low birthweight. The [CalEPA's calenviro 4.0 tool](#) shows some of these health impacts within the community. For instance, in the Delhi census tract, which is in the 99th percentile for pollution burden, residents rank in the 59th percentile for asthma, 41st percentile for cardiovascular disease, and 82nd percentile for low birth weight compared to all other communities in California. Community members should not also be asked to bear the disproportionate health impacts of this environmental pollution.

This issue is even more problematic when we consider many Santa Ana residents' limited access to healthcare that is needed to address diseases related to environmental pollution. [Sixteen percent](#) of Santa Ana's population is uninsured – double the [nationwide average of 8.2%](#). This means Santa Ana residents are twice as likely to be at risk of untreated health conditions caused by and exacerbated from environmental pollution.

Conclusion

By prioritizing the addition of an environmental justice staff position Santa Ana will be able to equitably create and implement crucial policies the community needs. Adding this position will also allow the city to become more competitive when applying for future environmental justice or climate focused grants since there will already be dedicated staff to execute grant requirements. For example with a staff of only three full time environmental employees Irvine was able to secure a grant for [1 million dollars](#) in climate funding. This position will allow Santa Ana to follow through on more than 50

environmental justice commitments made to residents and be better positioned to get more funding to continue this work.

We look forward to working with you to ensure health, safety, and a sustainable future for all Santa Ana community members. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with questions, the Climate Action Campaign team wants to be a resource, and is always here to provide assistance.

Sincerely,

Lexi Herandez

OC Climate Equity Organizer and Advocate



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