



Climate and Environmental Justice in the Growth Management Act

Taking the HEAL Act Local

Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) was a groundbreaking environmental achievement in 1990, but its focus on protecting "critical areas" and ecosystems overlooks places where people—due to pollution, uneven or unfair development, and now climate change—also need protection.

Your ZIP code, your income, race, or language ability should not determine how healthy and safe you are, but we know that in many communities our ability to withstand a natural disaster, find and keep stable housing, and even just walk to a bus stop varies significantly according to who we are and where we live. While the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act defines environmental justice in state law and requires state agencies to take action on environmental justice, **we also need action on the local level to realize our vision.**

Requiring Environmental Justice in Local Planning

The GMA requires cities and counties to develop comprehensive plans and policies that account for the needs of a local area and impact policies, zoning, and more. Plans cover 13 elements, which are issue areas that a city or county must plan for, such as housing, transportation, and land use. **Currently, planners are not required to consider equity or develop city or county plans through an environmental justice lens.**

That's why Front and Centered developed a proposal to add Environmental Justice to ensure that plans include strategies to address environmental health disparities. We're also advocating for better, more equitable public participation requirements and funding.

Our proposal requires planners to:

- Identify, plan for, and address environmental health disparities
- Identify overburdened communities and vulnerable populations in their area
- Develop objectives, timelines, policies, goals, measures that reduce environmental harms and create environmental benefits through regulations, decisions on siting and permitting, resource allocation, enforcement, and monitoring and reporting
- Target resources to support the participation of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations, including community-based organizations

Requiring Climate in the Growth Management Act

Front and Centered continues to shape and support adding a climate goal and element (see [H.B. 1099 from 2022](#)), addressing community resilience and reducing transportation emissions in particular. These amendments would make sure that overburdened communities and vulnerable populations as related to climate change are specifically considered in comprehensive plans as a priority, not as an afterthought or sacrifice.