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PRESS RELEASE

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Comments: EPA Needs to Ensure Grant Funding Under Inflation Reduction Act Furthers Environmental Justice

BALTIMORE, MD (April 13, 2023) – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown joined a coalition of eight Attorneys General calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure that the benefits of EPA’s Environmental and Climate Justice (ECJ) Block Grant Program reach underserved communities as intended under the historic Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

The ECJ program will provide \$3 billion in funding to community-based organizations, local government agencies, institutions of higher education, and Tribes for projects aimed at reducing pollution and promoting clean energy in disadvantaged communities. The program is one of the many programs geared toward advancing environmental justice under the IRA, which makes the nation’s largest ever investments in tackling climate change.

“We must hold the line and commit to improving long overdue injustices in underserved communities,” said Attorney General Brown. “Grant money should go where it belongs: to areas where the air isn’t always safe to breathe, the drinking water can be questionable, or where it is too dangerous for children to safely play outdoors. Clear written guidelines for the ECJ grant program will help guarantee a better quality of life is on the horizon for so many who have waited too long.”

In [comments](#) filed in response to EPA’s request for public information, the coalition applauds EPA’s commitment to implementing its ECJ program efficiently, meaningfully, and equitably. If done correctly, the coalition contends, the IRA and ECJ program have the potential to make a meaningful difference in underserved communities in Maryland and nationwide. But EPA must meaningfully engage communities and design its ECJ program to ensure its funding advances community priorities. To that end, the coalition urges EPA to provide clear standards and definitions, implement equity and value community in grant scoring procedures, and prioritize the funding and allocation of resources directly to community-based organizations.

Specifically, the coalition recommend that EPA:

- Provide a clear definition of the term “disadvantaged community” for purposes of the grant program;

- Utilize quantitative factors by which disadvantaged communities can be measured to identify and support the communities most disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis and environmental harms;
- Take proactive steps to incorporate equity into its grant proposals, applications, and evaluation and scoring processes;
- Prioritize and provide higher value to an applicant's connection to the community and its history working with disadvantaged and underserved communities;
- Evaluate all grant applicants based on the same criteria and standards;
- Prioritize projects that provide clear and specific details on how and when community engagement and public participation will occur; and
- Collect feedback directly from impacted community members to track and measure relevant program progress and outcomes to ensure the benefits of the project are directly reaching those who need them the most.

Joining Attorney General Brown in filing the comments are the Attorneys General of Colorado, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/041323a.pdf>