



## NEW JERSEY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ALLIANCE

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S FIRST YEAR COMMUNITY LETTER

Dearest Family, Friends and Supporters,

It has been one year since I assumed leadership of NJ's premiere statewide organization dedicated to Environmental Justice since its founding 19 years ago. I am truly pleased with the progress we've made this year and I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts.

First, our deep condolences to all of those who have lost loved ones in the past year. The cumulative impacts of environmental pollution combined with social determinants of health like race, income and zip code during the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, made life even more tenuous in EJ Communities.

We simultaneously found our entire EJ movement under threat. We saw our language and campaigns co-opted by mainstream environmental organizations that at one time intentionally excluded our stories and still hesitate to engage meaningfully with EJ Organizations led by people of color. We experienced gaps in funding compared to those same organizations as foundations struggled to address their own history and practices of institutional racism. We also fought environmental policies that would harm Low Income and Communities of Color, instead of protecting them.

But through struggles come victories. We commissioned an important [study](#) to support our work towards zero emissions in the freight sector. NJEJA was part of the four group coalition that got the nation's first Cumulative Impacts and Environmental Justice [bill](#) passed into [law](#), right here in New Jersey and we were awarded the Governor's [Award](#) for Environmental Excellence for that work. We became part of [New Jersey Thrives](#), a powerhouse coalition of organizers and advocates for environmental, climate, labor and housing justice. Our Board Chair, Dr. Nicky Sheats, Esq. was appointed to the [White House Environmental Justice Council](#). We reclaimed our virtual space with a new [website](#) and an amazing social media campaign. We expanded our community of supporters through countless talks, webinars and roundtable discussions. And we continue to do what we do best, push for real transformational changes in the practices and policies that harm people and the planet for profit.

In our work no fight is ever truly won. Even victories carry the possibility of future defeat. But we take heart in knowing that no fight is ever truly lost. As long as our communities suffer under the burdens of the cumulative impacts of environmental pollution we shall persist - of that you can be sure. We push forward in the legacy of our ancestors and with the hopes of the Seventh Generation.

Towards our 20th Anniversary and beyond, yours in solidarity,

Melissa

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