



Climate and Environmental Justice in the Growth Management Act

Taking the HEAL Act Local with Senate Bill 5651 and House Bill 1723

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 legislation 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.

Senate Bill 5651 and House Bill 1723 will require planners to:

- Identify and plan for the reduction and prevention of environmental and health disparities
- Identify and prioritize vulnerable populations and overburdened communities for environmental benefits
- Align local planning with state environmental justice in the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act
- Embed equity and environmental justice across all other elements in the Growth Management Act
- Make specific efforts to involve and collaborate with frontline communities

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.