

Session: Aligning with Our Communities

Speaker: Marisa Ordonia, Associate Attorney, Earthjustice

Community: Environmental Justice

1. Briefly describe the work you and your organization do to advocate for this population/issue.

Earthjustice is a national, nonprofit environmental law organization. We wield the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health; to preserve magnificent places and wildlife; to advance clean energy; and to combat climate change. We represent a wide diversity of clients, from small grassroots groups to large national organizations, free of charge and choose cases strategically rather than based on the client's ability to pay. Earthjustice is committed to expanding our work and partnerships with communities disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution and climate change. Representing these disproportionately impacted communities is a critical priority of our legal, advocacy, and communications efforts.

2. What challenges is this population/issue experiencing? Have these challenges changed over the last year with the election and new administration? If so, how?

In many ways the challenges have remained the same, but the potential remedies have become less clear. With the new administration, we've seen attacks on science and regulations that were put in place to protect people, and also budget proposals that would have drastically shrink the agencies charged with implementing and enforcing environmental laws and regulations. Where negotiations and settlements might once have been possible, we are now seeing delay and obfuscation. Under the Obama Administration, we saw exciting leadership and reinvigoration of environmental justice principles, and that is likely to be dismantled by the current administration.

3. How has your organization been responding to the challenges you describe above?

We're continuing to engage in litigation, both affirmative and defensive, at the federal and state levels. We have a strong policy team in Washington D.C., and an amazing communications team that helps us our clients tell their stories. We are also building partnerships and working with a broad range of clients and coalitions.

4. In your opinion, how is this population/issue and related challenges similar to the other issues represented on the panel?

Despite our country's pledge that all people are equal under the law, communities of color, indigenous communities, and low-income communities have historically and currently shoulder the burden of environmental impacts. Some examples are: farm workers, many of whom are immigrants, being poisoned by pesticides but not reporting it because of fear of retaliation or fears related to immigration status; issues of tribal sovereignty and rights in fossil fuel and land use cases; Title VI cases on pesticide use, and siting of landfills and power plants.

5. Are there other resources you would recommend to the audience members to help us deepen our understanding of this population/issue beyond the information you provided in the panel? (articles, books, trainings, movies, etc)

There are Washington specific reports on the Front and Centered Coalition website.

<http://frontandcentered.org/research/>

To learn more about specific cases that Earthjustice is working on, visit our website.

<http://earthjustice.org/>