



# Clark Atlanta University

Environmental Justice Resource Center

223 James P. Brawley Drive

Atlanta, GA 30314

October 8, 2009

The Honorable John Lewis  
U.S. House of Representatives  
343 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515-1005

Dear Congressman Lewis:

Thank you for your strong leadership in building the foundation for equal protection of our environmental and health laws. As environmental justice organizations and leaders we are advocates in communities throughout the eight states in EPA Region 4.

We the undersigned serve as public guardians, seeking to rectify the disproportionate impact of chemical exposures and environmental contamination in the low-income communities and communities of color that we represent. Our communities are not only disproportionately exposed to current chemicals from industrial polluters, and chemical plants in our neighborhoods, but additionally, our communities are the ones most frequently afflicted by legacy chemicals from many previous uses such as in abandoned Brownfield sites in our neighborhoods and multiple sources of lead that poison our children.

A long history of bad decisions in Region 4 has turned far too many low-income and people of color communities into the dumping grounds, lowering nearby residents' property values (stealing their wealth), and exposing them to unnecessary environmental health risks. Fundamental change is needed in this region, especially in states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) that have a legacy of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and resistance to civil rights and equal environmental protection under the law.

This point was driven home by the recent clean-up of a TVA coal ash spill in East Tennessee and disposal in predominately black Perry County, Alabama—a situation that parallels what happened in Warren County, North Carolina more than twenty-five years ago (PCB spill cleaned up along roadways in a dozen North Carolina Counties in 1978 and ultimately was dumped in mostly black Warren County in 1982; this act was defined as environmental racism and sparked the national EJ Movement).

The Warren County incident led to protests and more than 400 arrests. It also led District of Columbia Delegate Walter Fauntroy to call for a General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation on what was happening in Region 4 regarding hazardous waste facility siting—resulting in the “Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities” (1983). The GAO report found that 75 percent of the hazardous waste facilities were located in mostly black communities—although blacks made up about 20 percent of the region’s population.

This toxic dumping pattern was later confirmed with other polluting facilities in the South in “Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality,” nearly two decades ago. Numerous examples abound where Region 4 and state environmental agencies have failed to adequately respond to toxic contamination and public health threats in environmental justice communities, including Athens, GA (Dunlap Road and Pittard Road contaminated wells); Triana, AL (DDT water contamination); Anniston, AL (PCB contamination); Tallevast, FL (beryllium contamination); Pensacola, FL (Creosote, pentachlorophenol, polyaromatic hydrocarbons, and dioxin contamination); Hattiesburg, MS (Kerr McGhee contamination); Columbia, MS (chemical plant explosion contamination); Dickson, TN (TCE water contamination); Memphis, TN (military toxic contamination); Scarboro/Oakridge, TN (radioactive contamination) and others. A number of the above cases are chronicled in the September 14, 2009 *Dissident Voice* article “Need for EPA Inspector General Investigation of Region 4 Treatment of Black Communities” by professor Robert D. Bullard.

Based on these and other supporting data, we respectfully ask that you request (as Congressman Fauntroy did in 1983) an EPA Inspector General investigation or a U.S. General Accountability Office (GAO) investigation of Region 4—whichever one is deemed more appropriate—on the treatment and handling of environmental justice in the region. Generally, EPA has failed to provide equal protection for all as demonstrated by two EPA Inspector General reports: “EPA Needs to Consistently Implement the Intent of the Executive Order 12898” (2004) and “EPA Needs to Conduct Environmental Reviews of Its Program, Policies, and Activities” (2006).

We have secured an appointment with EPA Region 4 Acting Regional Administrator Stanley Meiberg on October 27, 2009 at 10:30am in Atlanta, GA for community leaders from around the eight-state region who have complaints about the EPA and their state environmental agency to submit their grievances and documentation in person to the acting regional administrator. The Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University will also submit electronic copies of the same documentation to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson. After our meeting with Acting Regional Administrator Meiberg, we invite you to join us at a 12:30pm press briefing in front of EPA Region 4 headquarters located at 61 Forsyth Street SW, Atlanta, GA.

Thank you for your continued leadership in protecting the health and environment of all Americans.

Sincerely,

## **GEORGIA**

Dr. Robert D. Bullard, Director, Environmental Justice Resource Center, Clark Atlanta University (Atlanta, GA)

Helen Butler, Executive Director, Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda (Atlanta, GA)

Felicia Davis, President, Just Environment & Gender Climate Change U.S. Focal Point (Atlanta, GA)

Jill McElheny, Vice Chair, Northeast GA Children's Environmental Health Coalition in support of Dunlap and Pittard Road Communities (Athens, GA)

Dr. Mildred McClain, Executive Director, Harambee House, Inc. and Citizens for Environmental Justice, Inc. (Savannah, GA)

Ela Ornstein, Lead Environmental Justice Attorney, GreenLaw Inc. (Atlanta, GA)

Faye Bush, Executive Director, New Town Florist Club (Gainesville, GA)

Shirley Hines, Concerned Citizens of Meriwether County Turkey Run Municipal Solid Waste Landfill and President of Meriwether County NAACP (Meriwether County, GA)

Charles Utley, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and CRSR Brownfields Commission (Augusta, GA)

## **ALABAMA**

Reverend James R. Murdock, President, Concerned Citizens of Perry County and Pastor, Living Hope Missionary Baptist Church (Uniontown, AL)

James Willard, President, Sand Mountain Concerned Citizens (Adler and Sand Mountain Area, AL)

Johnny Andrews, President, Citizens for a Clean Southwest Alabama (Repton, AL )

Debra E. Harris, President, Lowndes Citizens United for Action (Lowndes County, Alabama)

Barbara Evans, Organizing Coordinator, Wildlaw (Burkville, AL)

David Baker, President, Community Against Pollution (Anniston, AL)

## **FLORIDA**

Laura and Wanda Washington, President and Vice President, FOCUS (Tallevast, FL)

Francine Ishmael, Executive Director, Citizens Against Toxic Exposure (CATE)  
(Pensacola, FL)

Rachel Gelbmann, Florida Programs Assistant, Wildlaw (St. Petersburg, FL)

Jeanne Zokovitch Paben, Assistant Professor of Law and Director - Earth Advocacy  
Clinic, Barry University (Miami Shores, FL)

Deatra J. McCoy, Director, Legal Environmental Educational Social Justice (Fort  
Lauderdale, FL)

Jeannie Economos, Pesticide Safety and Environmental Health Project Coordinator,  
Farmworker Association of Florida (Apopka, FL)

## **KENTUCKY**

Elizabeth Crowe, Executive Director Kentucky Environmental Foundation (Berea, KY)

Eboni Cochran, Director, Rubbertown Emergency ACTION or REACT  
(Louisville, KY)

## **MISSISSIPPI**

Sherri Jones, Founder and Organizer, Forrest County Environmental Support Team  
(Hattiesburg, MS)

Tennie White, President, Environmental Consultant Trouble Shooters, Inc. (Jackson, MS)

Rev. Steve Jamison, Pastor, Marantha Faith Center (Columbus, MS)

## **NORTH CAROLINA**

Gary R. Grant, Director and President, North Carolina Environmental Justice Network  
(NCEJN) and Black Farmers & Agriculturalists Association (BFAA) (Tillery, NC)

Savi Home, Executive Director, Land Loss Prevention Project (Durham, NC)

Gary R. Redding, President/Board Chair, Concerned Citizens of Tillery (Tillery, NC)

Leah Wise, Executive Director, Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network (Durham, NC)

### **SOUTH CAROLINA**

David Dorch, Co-Leader, Concerned Citizens Against Toxic Contaminants (CATC) (Williston, South Carolina)

### **TENNESSEE**

Sheila Holt Orsted, Tennessee resident and plaintiff in civil rights and environmental lawsuits to cleanup TCE contamination (Dickson, TN)

Margaret L. Jones, Scarboro Community Resident (Oakridge, TN)

Gary Bullwinkel Greater Fredonia Community for Environmental Justice (Fayette County, TN)

Rita Harris, Environmental Justice Coordinator, Sierra Club (Memphis, TN)

Dr. Shirley Rainey, Associate Professor of Sociology, Fisk University (Nashville, TN)

### **NATIONAL GROUPS**

Leslie G. Fields, National Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships Director Sierra Club (Washington, DC)

Albert Huang, Environmental Justice Attorney, Natural Resources Defense Council (New York, NY)