

# Gov. Evers: Celebrates Earth Day, signs executive order creating the Office of Environmental Justice

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FRANKLIN — Gov. Tony Evers today celebrated Earth Day at the Indian Community School in Franklin by signing Executive Order #161 to create the Office of Environmental Justice at the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA). The Office of Environmental Justice will work in collaboration with the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy to facilitate collaboration across state agencies to provide strategies to promote environmentally just policies and prevent disparate outcomes in communities across the state while engaging with farmers and rural communities, communities of color, Tribal Nations, state and local partners, and low-income populations, among other key stakeholders.

Creating an Office of Environmental Justice was initially recommended by the [Governor's Task Force on Climate Change](#). The task force convened a diverse coalition of representatives from agriculture, business, Tribal Nations, utility companies, labor groups, youth, and other industries and communities from across the state to develop recommendations to combat the climate crisis in Wisconsin. Based on this recommendation, Gov. Evers included the creation of the Office of Environmental Justice in his [2021-23 biennial budget proposal](#). The provision was removed from the final budget by Republicans in the Legislature. The creation of the Office of Environmental Justice was again recommended by the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy in the state's first-ever Clean Energy Plan, [released earlier this week](#).

“Every Wisconsinite should have access to clean, safe drinking water, our state’s

natural resources, and great places to live, learn, and work,” said Gov. Evers. “Too many Wisconsinites have felt the effects of climate change firsthand—rural communities have had roads or bridges washed out, farmers have lost crops or livestock due to extreme weather, small business owners who’ve seen their businesses destroyed by floods, or the disparate health impacts we see due to polluted air and water. The Office of Environmental Justice will play a critical role by helping promote policies and strategies to enhance climate resilience, ensuring our communities and families can prepare for and recover from the effects of climate change, and getting resources and support to folks who need our help the most.”

The Office of Environmental Justice will be supported by a director of environmental justice, who will be charged with overseeing the Office’s operations and environmental justice work. It will also be supported by a chief resilience officer, who will be charged with leading the administration’s efforts to integrate resilience planning across state agency programs and assisting local government and Tribal Nation leaders in implementing climate resilience programs and projects in their communities to protect people and properties. Additionally, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will be bringing on an environmental justice policy advisor to work in partnership with the Office of Environmental Justice.

A [2021 report](#) from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that the impacts of climate change fall disproportionately on under-resourced communities who often lack the means to prevent, prepare for, or recover from extreme weather conditions and adverse effects of climate change, including rural areas, agricultural industries, communities of color, Tribal Nations, and low-income populations. As outlined in Executive Order #161, in order to combat these disparate outcomes and impacts, the Office of Environmental Justice will work to develop a framework and strategy for environmental justice work across the administration, advise the governor and the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy on policies, practices, and specific actions that the state should implement related to environmental justice, frequently engage with stakeholders and organizations across the state who represent groups most impacted by climate change and other environmental threats, and work with local governments and Tribal Nations on resilience efforts to take measures to address disaster preparedness aimed particularly at helping vulnerable communities.

Executive Order #161 is available [here](#).

The governor's 2022 Earth Day proclamation is available [here](#).