UNITED STATES
CLIMATE ALLIANCE

Brenda Mallory, Chair
The White House Council on Environmental Quality
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool Beta Version – Docket (CEQ-2022-0002)

May 24, 2022

Dear Chair Mallory,

I write to you on behalf of the U.S. Climate Alliance (Alliance), a bipartisan coalition of two dozen U.S. governors representing more than half of the U.S. population and approximately 60 percent of the U.S. economy, all committed to advancing climate action. I am writing to commend the Administration for its work on the Justice40 Initiative, to provide feedback on the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), and to encourage your team to work even more closely with Alliance states in the refinement of this tool moving forward.

Like the Administration, the Alliance is committed to centering equity, environmental justice, and a just economic transition in our efforts to achieve our climate goals and create good community- and family-sustaining jobs. To meet this commitment, states are creating more participatory processes and practices across government, such as inclusive community engagement programs and equity screening tools. Screening tools like CEJST can help identify and eliminate existing disparities and expand economic diversification efforts to communities impacted by climate change. By relying on publicly-available, nationally-consistent data, CEJST establishes a new federal floor for tools that can ensure disproportionately at-risk populations obtain the financial, technical, and institutional resources they require.

However, we believe this tool can also be improved and strengthened by:

1) <u>Visually identifying communities facing cumulative burdens and how they vary over time</u>. The CEJST currently identifies communities as "disadvantaged" if their census tract exceeds a socioeconomic threshold and one or more thresholds for environmental or climate indicators. However, the tool does not explicitly identify communities exceeding thresholds from multiple indicators at once. Without an ability to aggregate these cumulative burdens, the tool puts communities facing multiple hazards on a level field with those facing fewer, lessening the usefulness of this tool for government resource allocation decisions. In addition, the tool currently captures a static representation of impacts, whereas including indicators' rate of change over time could be a more effective measure to identify greatest community needs.

2) <u>Ensuring the use of this tool will address the legacy of environmental racism and racial injustice</u>. The CEJST does not currently use racial demographic data as an indicator to help identify disadvantaged communities, even though Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities have historically faced a disproportionate burden of climate impacts and fossil fuel pollution.[1] Race as a key indicator of disproportionate burden is well-documented in academic literature over decades, as are legacies of environmental injustice in BIPOC communities.[2] The impact of policies and programs designed to alleviate systemic racial injustice will inevitably be less effective with proxy indicators. While the tool rightly focuses on low-income households, and we recognize the Administration's limitations and challenges, we encourage continuing to identify opportunities within the tool's data, functions, and analysis to account for these considerations.

3) <u>Working with state, local, and tribal governments to mitigate the potential misalignment between Justice40 and other local equity frameworks and tools.</u> As environmental, energy, and economic justice policy evolves and equity screening tools are developed at the local level, there is potential for misalignment in community designations between federal and state tools, given the data and methodology used. This misalignment can create challenges in the administration of federal funds at the state level and cause confusion amongst communities and stakeholders. Working together, we can better understand how state tools and programs can complement federal implementation guidance and identify opportunities to effectively implement more equitable policies and investments.

The Alliance appreciates our strong state-federal relationship and believes that effective collaboration can result in a more vibrant, healthy, and prosperous America for all.

Sincerely,

Casey Katims
Executive Director, U.S. Climate Alliance

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[1] See: Ihab Mikati et al. "Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status." American Journal of Public Health (April 2018). https://ajph.Aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304297; U.S. Global Change Research Program. "Chapter 15: Tribes and Indigenous Peoples." Fourth National Climate Assessment, 2018 (revised June 2019). https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/15/; U.S. Global Change Research Program. "Chapter 9: Populations of Concern." The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment (2016). https://health2016.globalchange.gov/low/ClimateHealth2016_09_Populations_small.pdf.

[2] See: Paul Mohai et al. "Environmental Justice." Annual Review of Environment and Resources (July 2009). https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-environ-082508-094348; Christopher Tessum et al. "PM2.5 polluters disproportionately and systemically affect people of color in the United States." Science Advances (April 2021). https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abf4491; Robert Bullard. "Race and Environmental Justice in the United States." Yale Journal of International Law, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1993): 319-335. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/72837516.pdf