

INTRODUCTION OF THE
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT**HON. JOHN LEWIS**

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 21, 1999

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to introduce the Environmental Justice Act. This legislation would help address the concerns of poor and minority communities throughout our nation who may be disproportionately exposed to incinerators, toxic waste dumps, and other forms of pollution.

As many of you know, back in 1992, then Senator AL GORE and I introduced the first Environmental Justice Act. Even back then, we

knew about the dangers of toxics and other forms of pollution. We heard the stories of Love Canal, Cancer Alley and Chicago's Toxic Donut. We knew that poor and minority families, and children in particular, were getting sick. Children were getting cancer. Parents were dying of rare diseases. Something was going on.

The Environmental Justice Act seeks to establish the link between environmental pollution and the communities that were riddled with cancer and other diseases. This legislation also would provide help to these communities. It would restrict the siting of new polluting facilities and provide basic health services to residents.

As I have always said, people have the right to know what is in the air they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat. We have

the right to know if the chemical plant down the street—or that incinerator around the corner—is poisoning our families. Each and every one of us has that right.

And if that chemical plant, or incinerator, or toxic waste dump is killing our neighbors, our children, our communities—then it is time for the killing to stop. Protecting the health and well-being of our families is a matter of justice. It is a fundamental human right—just like freedom of speech—just like freedom of press—just like the right to vote.

The Environmental Justice Act is an important step toward guaranteeing this right. I am hopeful that my colleagues will lend their support to this legislation and will help ensure that all Americans grow up in, and live in, a healthy environment.