

A Letter from Maya K. van Rossum: Racial Justice Demands Constitutional “Green Amendments”

Below are excerpts of Maya's letter read from a few environmental justice leaders and community members from across the nation who have joined her in delivering this message. Read Maya's full letter addressing environmental justice and hear their powerful voices delivering this message on video at: <http://bit.ly/GreenAmendmentEnviroJustice>



“The brutal murders of Black Americans have sparked a proactive uprising with communities joining together to demand that cities, states, and our federal government demilitarize and retrain our police, and address the racial inequities within our medical, judicial, and educational systems.”

Dean Shirley Jefferson is the associate dean for Student Affairs and Diversity, an associate professor of law who teaches Race and the Law, and founder of the Minority Student Group at Vermont Law School. She serves as a member of the president's/Dean's administrative cabinet, creating a unique environment for manifesting a commitment to cultural diversity.



“While we rally to reform policing, and work to end all forms of systemic inequality, we cannot neglect the environment. We can't achieve true racial equality without achieving environmental equality. And doing that requires more than another law, policy, or program. To overcome the deeply entrenched, and sadly racialized environmental inequality that plagues our country, we must instead use the strategy that ended slavery, secured voting rights, and promised due process protections for all people: our state and federal constitutions.”

Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley is a civil rights activist who marched with Dr. M.L. King, Jr. He is the former Dean at Clark Atlanta University and program administrator at the Morehouse School of Medicine. He is a psychologist who has directed numerous academic programs at all educational levels. Dr. Durley is a White House Champion of Change recipient and is Board Chair of one of America's largest Interfaith environmental organization.



“And a recent tour of the Chaco Canyon region in New Mexico demonstrates with devastating clarity, indigenous communities continue to serve as environmental and fossil fuel sacrifice zones with drilling sites, wastewater pits, and truck traffic overwhelming the people, lands, homes, and landscapes found there.”

Terry Sloan is a Navajo and Hopi Native American from Arizona and the Director of Southwest Native Cultures, where he is an accredited member of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as an Indigenous Peoples Organization. He also serves as the City of Albuquerque's Intergovernmental Tribal Liaison.



“The victory also demonstrates that it's not through the federal constitution alone that people can defend their inalienable rights – there's also tremendous power in constitutional protection at the state level too.”

Barry E. Hill is a visiting scholar at the Environmental Law Institute. Previously, he was the Senior Counsel for Environmental Governance of the Office of International and Tribal Affairs at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He also served as the Director of the Office of Environmental Justice at the EPA.



“But even if we eliminate police violence, and overturn all other economic disparities, racial inequality will persist if we don't solve environmental racism. It's time to reclaim our environmental rights, and protect our communities and natural landscapes from government-sanctioned violence. The only way to do this is through our constitutions.”

Senator Antoinette Sedillo Lopez has served New Mexico's 16th District since 2019 and was previously a Professor of Law/Associate Dean at the University of New Mexico for 27 years. She formerly served as executive director of Enlace Comunitario, an anti-domestic violence nonprofit conducting outreach to Latino immigrant communities.



“Let's champion Green Amendments in state constitutions across our nation, and build momentum to secure one in our federal constitution, so that we can truly deliver on the promise of racial, and environmental, justice for all.”

Maya K. van Rossum is the Founder of Green Amendments For the Generations, a grassroots non-profit organization inspiring a nationwide movement to secure constitutional recognition and protection of environmental rights. van Rossum is also the Delaware Riverkeeper and leading environmental activist and attorney at the Delaware Riverkeeper Network for the past 26 years.