In testimony at an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) public hearing on the Clean Power Plan (CPP), Emerald Cities Collaborative (ECC) called for equity and inclusion for low-income communities of color as states develop and implement CPP-mandate carbon reduction plans.

“Our particular approach to the Clean Power Plan is one of equity and inclusion to ensure that our communities are not left out of our nation’s current clean-energy revolution,” ECC Vice President, Policy & Government Affairs, Felipe Floresca said in his prepared statement.

Today’s hearing was one in a series EPA is holding around the country as it prepares for implementation of the CPP final rule, which was released August 3 and formally published in the Federal Register October 23. In addition to offering testimony at the November 18 hearing at EPA headquarters in Washington, D.C., ECC plans to submit comments on the final rule, both on its own and jointly with a number of allied organizations.

Equity, Inclusion Defined
In the context of the CPP, Floresca explained, equity means that state carbon-reduction plans will benefit all urban communities. He referenced ECC President Denise Fairchild’s April 2015 article in Governing magazine entitled “The Making of an Energy Ghetto” that asked whether low-income communities of color “will reap the benefits of the emerging clean-energy economy or be locked into energy ghettos” that lack access to clean, affordable power such as renewable energy.

He added that equity must be considered when EPA decides how to allocate the value of pollution allowances, which will be an important tool for fostering economic development in low-income communities of color. Those allocations, and the revenues they generate, should be used to guarantee not only environmental but also economic benefits, he said.

Floresca emphasized that the benefits of the Clean Power Plan must be realized throughout each state. “It is quite possible, for example, that California – the Golden State, often heralded as being at the forefront of the environmental movement – could meet or even surpass its statewide CPP carbon-reduction targets while failing to address the pollution problems and resulting health problems in what are called environmental hot spots – communities located near power plants that are subject to high levels of pollution,” he said.
He tied the high rates of pollution-related illness such as cancer, asthma and other respiratory diseases in communities of color to the reality that 68 percent of African-Americans and 40 percent of Latinos live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant and more than half of Asian Pacific Islanders in the United States live in counties with unhealthy air quality.

Floresca want on to explain that “inclusion” in the CPP requires a transparent process that allows engagement of representatives of low-income communities of color in the development of state implementation plans.

**Active Engagement Required**
Floresca praised EPA for requiring states to demonstrate how they are actively engaging low-income communities of color in development of their CPP plans and for including in the final rule the Clean Energy Incentive program (CEIP) that will reward states for early investments in solar and wind power and demand-side energy efficiency.

“CEIP gives vulnerable communities the opportunity to generate wealth by turning property owners and communities into energy producers through community ownership of energy resources, as well as to create clean-energy jobs for local residents,” Floresca said.

He continued, “ECC and its allies are resolute and determined that low-income communities of color will reap all of the benefits of the Clean Power Plan. We are determined to address – and reverse – the disparate impacts of poverty and pollution.

“The Clean Power Plan can be a positive game changer for the communities we care so much about and on whose behalf we work every day. The promise of a healthy and viable future for our next generation lies with us and with needed public policies such as the CPP,” Floresca concluded.

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