



**U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
Subcommittee on Chemical Safety, Waste Management,  
Environmental Justice, and Regulatory Oversight**

**Hearing on “Impacts of Plastic Production and Disposal on Environmental Justice Communities”**

**June 15, 2023**

**Remarks of Donna Jackson, Director of Membership Development, Project 21**

Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Mullin, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Donna Jackson and I am the Director of Membership Development for Project 21 – the black leadership network of the National Center for Public Policy Research. Project 21 is one of the oldest and largest black conservative think tanks in the country. Our hundreds of members come from all walks of life, from small business owners to law enforcement to assembly line workers to teachers to energy producers to clergy to health care workers. Most of us are not career activists, lawyers, or lobbyists, and more than a few actually live in the communities we hope to improve. We cover a wide range of issues, but our fundamental focus is lifting people out of poverty and dependence and into prosperity and self-sufficiency.

I’ll make my main point up front and tell you that I think it is an overwhelmingly positive thing for struggling communities to have industrial facilities nearby, including plastics manufacturing. The high wage blue collar jobs that these employers provide are in many cases the best ones available for those without college degrees. And if you look at the history of the creation of a black middle class over the last century, it is these gateway jobs that lifted up millions of families and broke the cycle of poverty.

I know that in my own family history I can point to relatives who worked at Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, U.S. Steel, and General Dynamics. Not only were they able to provide for their families, but they were also able to become homeowners and save for retirement. Perhaps most importantly, they were able to provide the educational opportunities that allowed the next generation to attend college and pursue various professions. And as a result, their kids and now grandkids never had to suffer even one day of poverty or helplessness. To be blunt about it, it is downright crazy to suggest that my family would have been better off if these factories were never allowed to be located near them.

And it is not just the direct jobs. Every big manufacturing facility supports many small businesses in the community, and quite a few of these vendors are minority-owned. They also contribute to the tax base that pays for things like schools and police protection. But none of that can happen without the local industrial base, whether it's a plastics plant or a refinery or an automaker.

Now, we will hear a lot about the environmental dangers of living near or working in these facilities, including plastics plants. I think a sense of perspective is in order. American manufacturers are subjected to the most rigorous environmental standards in the world, including plastics plants, and industrial emissions have declined substantially over the last several decades. For every study claiming a cancer cluster or a statistical association with some other disease, there are others that find that low-income people living near these facilities are no worse off than comparably poor people in general. And I think it is worth noting that the environmental activists who focus on weak correlations between industrial emissions and health impacts tend to ignore the undeniable and well documented improvements that come with the transition from poverty to well-paying employment. Beyond reduced illness and

disease, good jobs lead to stronger families and substantially lower rates of domestic and sexual violence and other traumas.

And as far as my relatives who worked for big manufacturers are concerned, the only difference I could see in their health was the benefit of having better medical care that comes with a good salary. I might add that several of my factory worker aunts and uncles and cousins are still with us and some have celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays.

In conclusion, the enemy is not trace emissions into the air and water from industrial activity. The enemy is poverty. And that is why any attempt to shut down good industrial jobs will do a lot more harm than good in the communities and people that need these jobs the most.