

**HOUSE . . . . . No.**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

***Christopher J. Worrell***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

**An Act of improving environmental justice in Black communities.**

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Christopher J. Worrell</i>	<i>5th Suffolk</i>	<i>1/8/2025</i>

**HOUSE . . . . . No.**

[Pin Slip]

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court  
(2025-2026)**

An Act of improving environmental justice in Black communities.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. Whereas Black/African American, Asian, Indigenous, Latino/Hispanic, and  
2 low-income persons of the Commonwealth have been adversely and disproportionately impacted  
3 by environmental burdens posed by living and working in environmental justice neighborhoods,  
4 it is the intention of the general court, to authorize meaningful actions to redress said impacts. To  
5 achieve the purposes as stated in this section as well as sections 2 and 3, inclusive, this Act shall  
6 be known as the Commonwealth GREEN ZONES ACT.

7           SECTION 2. As used in sections 1 through 4, inclusive, the following words shall, unless  
8 the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:-

9           “Environmental Audit” means a comprehensive study undertaken by the secretary for the  
10 purpose of identifying and quantifying the number and type of environmental burdens as defined  
11 herein and shall include but not be limited to public health data, public safety data, energy  
12 burden, transportation access data, and land use where such data is useful in quantifying the  
13 environmental burden within an environmental justice neighborhood.

14           Where clusters of environmental burden and/or opportunity to create environmental  
15 sustainability and Environmental resilience exist, those areas will be defined as “Green Zones”  
16 for the purpose of planning and funding.

17           The audit will include determining prior causes of environmental burden, where possible  
18 if those conditions still exist, and the ideal future “Green” state.

19           “Environmental Burdens” means (a) any destruction, damage, or impairment of natural  
20 resources that is not insignificant, resulting from intentional or reasonably foreseeable causes,  
21 including but not limited to climate change, air pollution, water pollution, soil contamination,  
22 improper sewage disposal, dumping of solid wastes and other noxious substances, excessive  
23 noise, activities that limit access to natural resources and constructed outdoor recreational  
24 facilities and venues, inadequate remediation of pollution, reduction of groundwater levels,  
25 impairment of water quality, increased flooding or stormwater flows, and damage to inland  
26 waterways and waterbodies, wetlands, marine shores, and waters, forests, open spaces, and  
27 playgrounds from private industrial, residential, commercial and government operations or other  
28 activity that contaminates or alters the quality of the environment and poses a risk to public  
29 health.

30           “Environmental sustainability” means the ability to maintain an ecological balance in the  
31 natural environment and conserve natural resources to support the well-being of current and  
32 future generations.

33           “Environmental resilience” means the capacity of an ecosystem to respond to a  
34 perturbation or disturbance by resisting damage and recovering quickly.

35           “Environmental Justice Neighborhood” means a neighborhood located within a  
36 municipality designated as an Environmental Justice Community and which meets one or more  
37 of the following criteria: (i) the annual median household income is not more than 65 percent of  
38 the statewide annual median household income; (ii) minority individuals comprise 40 percent or  
39 more of the population; (iii) 25 percent or more of households lack English language proficiency  
40 or (iv) minorities comprise 25 percent or more of the population and the annual median  
41 household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150  
42 percent of the statewide annual median household income.

43           “Green Zone” means an area or areas within a targeted environmental justice  
44 neighborhood identified pursuant to an environmental audit in which specific strategies to  
45 mitigate, redress and eliminate environmental burdens and the ability to improve and increase  
46 environmental sustainability and resilience exists.

47           "Lack of English Language Proficiency" refers to households that, according to federal  
48 census forms, do not have an adult proficient in English.

49           “Minority” refers to individuals who identify themselves as Latino/Hispanic,  
50 Black/African American, Asian, Indigenous people, and people who otherwise identify as non-  
51 white.

52           “Neighborhood” means a census block group as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau but  
53 not including individuals who live in college dormitories or individuals under formally  
54 authorized, supervised care or custody, including but not limited to federal prisons, state prisons,  
55 or county house of corrections.

56 "Officer", "officers" and "administrative officers", means, when used without further  
57 qualification or description, any person or persons in charge of any department or division of a  
58 city.

59 "Secretary" means the secretary of the executive office of energy and environmental  
60 affairs.

61 "Targeted Environmental Justice Community" means a municipality designated as an  
62 environmental justice community that meets two or more of the following criteria: (i) the  
63 municipality is comprised of 100 or more block groups; (ii) the percentage of block groups  
64 defined as environmental justice block groups is not less than 75% of all block groups located  
65 within the municipality; or (iii) the population of individuals residing within environmental  
66 justice block groups is not less than 100,000

67 "Targeted Environmental Justice Neighborhood" means an environmental justice  
68 neighborhood within a Targeted Environmental Justice Community in which areas within the  
69 environmental justice neighborhood may be designated or otherwise identified as green zones.

70 SECTION 3. (a) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the  
71 Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs is hereby authorized and directed to  
72 conduct an environmental audit of environmental justice neighborhoods located within the  
73 Commonwealth.

74 (b) In furtherance of conducting the environmental audit, the secretary is hereby  
75 authorized to create an environmental audit working group, consisting of not less than nine  
76 persons who live or work in an environmental justice neighborhood, to provide advice to the  
77 secretary on the conduct of said environmental audit. Said members of the environmental audit

78 working group shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for expenses necessarily  
79 incurred in the performance of serving on the working group.

80 (c) The secretary upon completion of an environmental audit shall transmit the findings  
81 of said environmental audit, in report format, to the officer of the municipality in which the  
82 environmental justice neighborhood is located, pursuant to the environmental audit, shall identify  
83 and designate within said environmental justice neighborhoods areas to be known as green  
84 zones.

85 (d) Pursuant to subsections (a) and (b) of this section, the secretary shall, bi-annually, not  
86 later than October 1, shall report to the clerks of the house of representatives and senate, chairs  
87 of house and senate committees on ways and means, and the chairs of the joint committee on  
88 environment, natural resources and agriculture the findings of said environmental audit and shall  
89 cause said environmental audit to be published on the main webpage of the executive office of  
90 environmental affairs.

91 (e) In addition to conducting an environmental audit, the secretary shall designate green  
92 zones within targeted environmental justice neighborhoods; provided that in addition to the  
93 working group created pursuant to subsection (c) of this section, the Secretary shall consult and  
94 otherwise provide opportunities for input by residents of targeted environmental justice  
95 neighborhoods in the process of designating said green zones.

96 (f) Pursuant to this Section, the Secretary is hereby authorized to enter into an intrastate  
97 compact with the officer of the environmental justice community for which an environmental  
98 audit was conducted. Said intrastate compact shall be designed to establish and define the levels  
99 of cooperation that may be developed in an effort to realize the goals and objectives of green

100 zones, so designated, within a targeted environmental justice neighborhood. Said levels of  
101 cooperation may include, be limited to, the designation of agency staff, the provision of other  
102 technical assistance, the making of planning grants, and such other means that are otherwise  
103 authorized by existing state law.

104 SECTION 4. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, this act shall  
105 take effect immediately.