

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Ash Kalra, Chair
AB 1584 (Jackson) – As Introduced January 13, 2026

SUBJECT: STATE AIR RESOURCES BOARD: OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

KEY ISSUE: SHOULD AN OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE CALIFORNIA AIR RESOURCES BOARD TO BETTER ASSIST THE AGENCY IN SERVING THE NEEDS OF CALIFORNIA'S FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES?

SYNOPSIS

The California Air Resources Board is tasked with enforcing California's wide-ranging and strict pollution control laws. Not only does the agency oversee the state's Cap and Invest program but the Air Resources Board also oversees pollution rules for cars and trucks, the ports, and some stationary sources. One of the agency's most important and pressing challenges is reducing particulate pollution in communities adjacent to transit corridors, communities that are typically lower income and more diverse than the state overall. Unfortunately, in 2020 troubling allegations arose within the agency about the treatment of Black staff. Not only did staff allege a series of frequent microaggressions but also noted that agencywide recruitment and retention of minority staff was inadequate. The author and proponents of this bill note that a workforce that does not reflect the diversity of California will struggle to meet the needs of diverse environmental justice communities across this state.

To ensure that the Air Resources Board better represents and serves California's diverse communities, this bill would create an Office of Civil Rights within the California Air Resources Board. The bill would task the Office with providing trainings to agency staff on civil rights and the needs of diverse communities, improve language access for Californians engaging with the agency, and develop objective tools to study how agency rulemaking and enforcement actions is helping the state's diverse communities.

This bill is supported by the Coalition for Clean Air and the California Immigrant Policy Center who highlight the need for all state agencies, including the Air Resources Board, to better engage with frontline, environmental justice communities and applauds the bill's efforts to move the Air Resources Board in a positive direction. The proponents also applaud the bill's focus on improving language access for communities engaging with state regulators. The bill has no registered opposition.

SUMMARY: Establishes the Office of Civil Rights within the California Air Resources Board. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the Office of Civil Rights within the California Air Resources Board and tasks the Office with doing the following:
 - a) Providing training on civil rights obligations to board staff, grantees, contractors, and subrecipients;

- b) Developing a civil rights evaluation tool to assist recipients in understanding and being able to meet their civil rights requirements;
 - c) Ensuring language access and culturally appropriate outreach in all public engagement processes, as specified; and
 - d) Coordinating with air pollution control districts and air quality management districts and the California Environmental Protection Agency to align civil rights compliance efforts statewide.
- 2) Requires the California Air Resources Board to post on its website an annual summary that includes, but is not limited to, the following information:
 - a) A summary of civil rights complaints received by the Office of Civil Rights;
 - b) A description of compliance and enforcement efforts by the Office relating to civil rights; and
 - c) An overview of public outreach and engagement activities carried out by the office.
 - 3) Provides that the bill's implementation is contingent on an appropriation.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Air Resources Board and tasks the Board with controlling emissions from motor vehicles and to coordinate, encourage, and review the efforts of all levels of government as they affect air quality. (Health and Safety Code Section 39500.)
- 2) Requires the California Air Resources Board to establish standards, rules, and regulations that are consistent with the state's goal of providing a decent home and suitable living environment for every Californian. (Health and Safety Code Section 39601.)
- 3) Establishes the Department of Human Resources to oversee the state's civil service system and to ensure that all applicants and employees in state service are treated in an equitable manner without regard to political affiliation, race, color, sex, religious creed, national origin, ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, disability, political or religious opinions or nonjob-related factors. (Government Code Section 18500.)

FISCAL EFFECT: As currently in print this bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS: In 2020, a group of Black employees at the California Air Resources Board submitted a letter to agency leadership highlighting bias and disparate treatment of Black employees within the agency. (<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/Letter-Action%20Plan%20for%20Racial%20Change%20at%20CARB.pdf>.) Seeking to ensure that the Air Resources Board is responsive to the needs of California's diverse communities, this bill would establish an Office of Civil Rights at the Air Board. In support of the bill, the author states:

Black and Latino Californians bear a disproportionate burden of air pollution exposure, the result of decades of inequitable land use policies, discriminatory zoning, and the systematic placement of freeways, industrial facilities, and waste sites near communities of color.

Meaningful representation is not a courtesy, it is a democratic obligation. CARB must reflect the diversity of the state it serves, through the appointment of board members and staff with deep roots in frontline communities, outreach conducted in multiple languages, and engagement embedded in trusted local institutions. The people most harmed by pollution have the clearest stake in the solutions, and until their voices carry real weight within the agency, California's environmental policies will continue to fall short of the equity they promise.

Troubling allegations about discriminatory employment practices at the California Air Resources Board. As mentioned, in 2020 Black employees at the Air Resources Board submitted a letter to agency leadership outlining systematic bias within the agency. The letter noted that the staff of the agency were disproportionately white, that white staff regularly discounted the opinion of better qualified Black staffers, and that the agency did not actively seek to recruit a diverse workforce. Somewhat ironically given the current federal administration's crusade against diversity efforts in workplace hiring, the United States Department of Justice used the letter as justification for commencing an investigation into the California Air Resources Board's hiring practices. (Stephen Lee, *DOJ Probes California EPA Alleging Discriminatory Hiring*, Bloomberg Law (Aug. 27, 2025) available at: <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/doj-investigates-california-epa-alleging-discriminatory-hiring>.)

In response to the allegations in the letter, the Air Resources Board established the Racial Equity Inventory's Community Partner Workgroup and has adopted a "vision for change" to improve the agency's internal policies and programs to better support a diverse workforce. (<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/equity>.) The author notes that improving diversity at the Air Resources Board is especially important given that one of the agency's core missions is to improve air quality and cut down on pollution in California's diverse frontline communities. The author argues that if that agency cannot properly treat and value the contributions of its non-white workforce then the agency will be too quick to gloss over the environmental concerns of diverse environmental justice communities across the state.

This bill would establish the Office of Civil Rights within the California Air Resources Board. The bill would specifically task the Office of Civil Rights with providing trainings to Board staff on their obligations under the law to frontline communities and develop a tool for the Board to utilize when evaluating the impact of Board policies and actions on communities of color. The bill also tasks the Office with ensuring adequate translation services for Californians interacting with the Board. The Office of Civil Rights would also serve as the Board lead point of contact for ensuring that the Board's parent agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency, as well as the regional air boards coordinate their efforts to protect frontline communities from the impact of pollution. The bill would require the Office of Civil Rights to provide annual public reports on the Board's efforts to promote compliance with civil rights laws and the Board's efforts to diversify and make more accessible its public outreach programs. Finally, reflecting the present state of the General Fund, the bill would make its enactment contingent on a subsequent legislative appropriation.

This bill follows other agencies in adopting specialized units to address environmental justice and the specific needs of communities of color. The environmental justice movement recognizes the disparities in environmental outcomes between communities across California and seeks to ensure fair outcomes in environmental protection and enforcement in communities

across the state. Too frequently California's lower-income communities of color experience far greater impacts from pollution, toxic contamination, and the effects of global warming than richer areas of the state. Furthermore, these communities rarely possess adequate resources to fully represent their interests in court or before state regulators seeking to address environmental harms. Accordingly, in recent years, the state has attempted to better assist these communities by coordinating state environmental programs to ensure that these communities are not left behind as California aggressively seeks to remediate past environmental harms and proactively mitigate the impacts of global climate change. To that end, as a part of the Budget Act of 2004, the Legislature required the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation to coordinate environmental justice programs across the state. (SB 1097 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review) Chap. 225, Stats. 2004.) More recently, the Legislature enacted AB 1628 (R. Rivas) Chap. 360, Stats. 2019 to ensure better coordination between the environmental justice units within various state agencies, similar to the efforts within the various levels of California Environmental Protection Agency envisioned by this bill. To that end, given that AB 1628 required the Attorney General and the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation to coordinate on statewide environmental justice efforts, *the author may wish to consider additional amendments to ensure coordination between the Air Resources Board's Office of Civil Rights and other civil rights and environmental justice focused agencies across state government.* However, recognizing the budget constraints currently facing the state, the Committee does not see fit to insist on such an amendment at this time.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: This bill is supported by the Coalition for Clean Air and the California Immigrant Policy Center. In support of the bill the California Immigrant Policy Center writes:

Frontline communities across California, predominantly communities of color, low-income residents, immigrant communities, and non-English-speaking households, continue to bear a disproportionate burden of air pollution and its devastating health consequences, including asthma, cardiovascular disease, and premature death. These same communities are now at heightened risk as federal rollbacks eliminate the enforcement mechanisms they have long depended on. By embedding a dedicated Office of Civil Rights within CARB, AB 1584 ensures that California's own environmental programs, grants, and contracts are held to the civil rights standards the federal government is abandoning.

Additionally, language access is foundational to equitable public engagement. AB 1584's requirements for translation and interpretation services, bilingual staffing, and multilingual public materials will ensure that the communities most affected by air quality decisions have a genuine seat at the table, not just a technical opportunity to participate. This is both a legal obligation and a matter of basic fairness.

We also appreciate that AB 1584 builds in structures for ongoing learning and improvement through annual public summaries of civil rights activities and coordinated efforts across CARB, local air districts, and CalEPA. These provisions signal a long-term commitment to getting this right, and they give community partners like our organizations a meaningful way to stay engaged and support CARB's work over time.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Immigrant Policy Center
Coalition for Clean Air

Opposition

None on file

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