

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1584 (Jackson)
As Introduced January 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes the Office of Civil Rights within the California Air Resources Board.

Major Provisions

- 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.

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 establishes an Office of Civil Rights at the Air Resources Board.

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 notes 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 establishes 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 its public outreach programs more accessible. 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.

According to the Author

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.

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 overtime.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, potential significant costs (Air Pollution Control Fund). CARB anticipates costs of \$1.5 in budget year and ongoing for the following:

- 1) Eight permanent positions, including a civil rights supervisor to manage the office and oversee compliance efforts; staff to develop and maintain a civil rights evaluation tool;

staff to develop and deliver civil rights training to CARB employees, grantees, contractors, and subrecipients; staff to investigate and track civil rights complaints and produce annual complaint and compliance summaries; and staff to provide language access services, including translation, interpretation, multilingual staffing, and multilingual public materials, and to maintain the office's civil rights webpage. CARB also identifies the need for staff to lead coordination with air pollution control districts, air quality management districts, and CalEPA on statewide civil rights compliance.

- 2) \$132,000 ongoing annually in administrative costs for personnel, facilities, asset management, and health and safety support.
- 3) \$170,000 for desktop support services, IT procurement, and development and maintenance of the civil rights webpage and evaluation tool.
- 4) \$229,000 for legal review and support of civil rights investigations and compliance activities.

VOTES

ASM JUDICIARY: 9-3-0

YES: Kalra, Lee, Bryan, Connolly, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Stefani, Zbur

NO: Macedo, Dixon, Sanchez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

VERSION: January 13, 2026

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FN: 0002615