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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

**Senator Blakespear, Chair**

**2025 - 2026 Regular**

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**Bill No:** AB 1584  
**Author:** Jackson  
**Version:** 6/9/2026  
**Urgency:** No  
**Consultant:** Heather Walters

**Hearing Date:** 6/17/2026  
**Fiscal:** Yes

**SUBJECT:** State Air Resources Board: Office of Civil Rights

**DIGEST:** This bill establishes an Office of Civil Rights within the California Air Resources Board and defines the responsibilities and duties thereof.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Air Resources Board (CARB) 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.)

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

- 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.

## Background

- 1) *Civil rights in California.* California enacted civil rights laws in 1959 to prohibit discrimination in employment and housing based on a person's race, religion, national origin and ancestry. In addition to the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEHA), the Unruh Civil Rights Act also passed that year prohibiting discrimination by business establishments. In the decades since, a number of additional state antidiscrimination laws have passed. They expanded the original act's list of protected classes to include as many as 18 characteristics such as sex and disability. In addition, sexual harassment and retaliation now are prohibited actions. California's civil rights laws were consolidated in 1980 under the jurisdiction of the Civil Rights Department (CRD), which is now the largest civil rights agency in the country. It is part of the state's Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency.
- 2) *Defining equity.* The concept of "equity" in policymaking is deceptively complex. PolicyLink, a national policy think tank, defines equity as "just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential."<sup>1</sup> Equity involves people having what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. Different groups of people — based on race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status — may need different types or amounts of resources and supports to enjoy full, healthy lives.

More specifically, equity is often broken down further into more detailed components. In a 2023 synthesis of federal equity action plans, the Urban Institute broke equity into the following components to evaluate programs:

- a) *Procedural equity*, when public decisionmaking processes are transparent, accessible, fair, and inclusive;

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<sup>1</sup> The Equity Manifesto. PolicyLink. <https://www.policylink.org/about/equity-manifesto>

- b) *Structural equity*, when government institutions and systems have the processes, practices, and policies to operationalize equity in how they function and make decisions; and
- c) *Distributional equity*, when there is an equitable distribution of resources, community burdens, and benefits.<sup>2</sup>

These dimensions of equity can be useful in considering AB 1584. Providing access to the public through appropriate-language outreach and tools for recipients promotes procedural equity. The proposed civil rights training to those working for and with CARB advances structural equity. Many of CARB's actions and regulations affect distributional equity in California; by strengthening the other two dimensions of equity with this bill, CARB could potentially advance greater distributional equity through future actions.

### Comments

- 1) *Purpose of 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."
- 2) *Equity concerns raised at CARB*. In 2020, Black employees at CARB 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.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pathways to Equity at Scale, 2023. Balu et al. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/pathways-equity>

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Lee, DOJ Probes California EPA Alleging Discriminatory Hiring, Bloomberg Law (Aug. 27, 2025) <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/doj-investigates-california-epa-alleging-discriminatory-hiring>

In response to the allegations in the letter, CARB 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.<sup>4</sup> The author notes that improving diversity at CARB 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.

Drilling down on equity within CARB's efforts to achieve California's climate goals specifically, as early as AB 32 in 2006 (Nunez, Chapter 488, Statutes of 2006) called for an Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC). Although the CARB EJAC has provided significant (and often critical) feedback and direction on CARB on proposed actions, members have often complained that such feedback was not adequately considered or valued. This recently culminated in the resignation of EJAC co-chair Dr. Catherine Garoupa in November of last year.<sup>5</sup> In her resignation, Dr. Garoupa cited "growing hostility toward EJAC that undermines its integrity" and "the increasing bias of the agency toward regulated industries and dismissal of the best available science, at the expense of low income communities and communities of color."

Although an Office of Civil Rights, as proposed by AB 1584, will not directly address the issues raised by Black CARB staffers nor Dr. Garoupa, both examples illustrate the benefits of requiring CARB to undertake a more active, integrated effort to include equity and civil rights across the range of activities and positions within the agency.

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

AB 715 (Addis, Chapter 428, Statutes of 2025) among other things, established the Office of Civil Rights under the Government Operations Agency with specified duties.

**SOURCE:** Author

**SUPPORT:**

None received

**OPPOSITION:**

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<sup>4</sup> CARB – Equity. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/equity>

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Garoupa, Letter to CARB Chair Lauren Sanchez and CARB Members. November 18, 2025. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/26289397-garoupa-ejac-resignation-letter-111825/>

None received

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