



Merkley, Schakowsky, Jayapal and Rush Introduce Resolution Recognizing Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Planning

Youth from across the nation urge Congress to recognize the disproportionate impacts of climate change on children and to protect their constitutional rights

September 23, 2020 Press Release

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (IL-09), a Senior Chief Deputy Whip and Chair of the Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal (WA-07), member of the House Committee on the Judiciary, and Congressman Bobby L. Rush (IL-01), Chair of the Energy Subcommittee of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, introduced a concurrent resolution in the Senate and in the House of Representatives to protect the fundamental rights of the nation's children given today's climate crisis. Seven Senators and 50 Representatives joined as original cosponsors of the resolution.

To watch a recording of today's press conference, click [here](#).

In September 2019, the [Juliana v. United States](#) youth plaintiffs and young American climate leaders, joined by Greta Thunberg, descended on Washington to tell our nation's leaders to act on climate. On the one-year anniversary of that historic event, young people from across the country will come together once more during the week of the resolution's introduction for virtual meetings hosted by [Our Children's Trust](#), [350.org](#) and the [National Children's Campaign](#). Their mission is to urge members of Congress to recognize their constitutional rights to a stable climate system and demand climate recovery planning.

The Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution recognizes that the current climate crisis disproportionately affects the health, economic opportunity, and fundamental rights of children, and demands that the United States develop a national, comprehensive, science-based, and just climate recovery plan to meet necessary emissions reduction targets. The resolution supports the principles underpinning *Juliana v. United States*, the landmark constitutional climate lawsuit brought by 21 young Americans, and youth climate organization Earth Guardians, who are suing the executive branch of the federal government for creating a national energy system that causes climate change.

"Every child—regardless of the color of their skin, the language they speak, or their parents' income—deserves a healthy and prosperous future. But how are they supposed to thrive if their planet is ravaged by frequent and extreme wildfires and hurricanes, and unprecedented heat waves and droughts?" said **Senator Merkley**. "The time is right now to take immediate and decisive steps to stand up for future generations, address the climate crisis, and tackle environmental injustice. To do anything less would be morally reprehensible."

"We're already seeing the devastating effects of the climate crisis, but it's today's children and future generations that will have to pay the bill," said **Congresswoman Schakowsky**. "As leaders of this nation, we have a duty to protect everyone, regardless of age or background, from the existential threat of climate change. That's why we are demanding a climate recovery plan that will put the U.S. on a path toward dramatically reducing global atmospheric carbon dioxide by the year 2100 and uphold children's fundamental rights. We already know that there multiple economically feasible ways to reach this target that will prioritize good jobs, equity, and the rights of today's youth to a stable climate."

The Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution highlights the principles behind the youth-led case, *Juliana v. United States*, by stating that a stable climate system is fundamental to a free and ordered society and is preservative of other fundamental rights. "The youth seek protection of their constitutional rights to life, liberty, property, and equal protection under the laws, which includes a climate system capable of sustaining human life," asserts **Congresswoman Jayapal**. "Everyday I see catastrophic climate-related events escalating. This resolution is more important than ever because children's rights are at stake. Today, we stand with our youth and we recognize their rights and the disproportionate impacts on children from the perils of climate change."

The climate movement aligns with the historic civil rights movement which once again is being led by the nation's courageous youth. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, children fought for their constitutional rights and sought a court order to desegregate schools. The *Juliana* plaintiffs are similarly fighting for their constitutional rights to a stable climate system, so that their generation and future generations can flourish. An additional parallel is evident as today's youth demand racial justice and environmental justice, two issues especially intertwined given the disproportionate impact of climate change on BIPOC and frontline youth and communities.

Civil rights experts [assert](#) that, "climate change is a racial justice issue that has, and will continue to have, particularly devastating effects on communities and people of color, especially the children." **Congressman Rush** states, "The devastation of systemic racism and the COVID-19 public health pandemic have ignited a sense of outrage and consciousness for the myriad injustices that persist in our nation. Through the introduction of this resolution, we shine a bright light on yet another injustice. Vulnerable and environmental justice communities, including communities of color, low-income communities, indigenous peoples, bear the brunt of climate change and are disproportionately exposed to pollution. Blatant disregard for this fact will continue to put the children within these communities, who are especially vulnerable, at greater risk."

For the full list of 57 original cosponsors and additional statements of support, click [here](#).

The Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution calls for renewed leadership by the United States in addressing today's climate crisis to uphold the rights of our children.

The youngest plaintiff in the *Juliana* case, 13-year-old Floridian Levi Draheim said, "I spent most of my life living on a barrier island and I joined the lawsuit when I was 8 years old because climate change harms young people like me. I have been evacuated from my home and my school has been closed due to hurricanes. I need to have a voice in the court system because my constitutional rights are at risk and I can't vote. I feel hopeful that members of Congress are now recognizing my fundamental rights and demanding a climate plan to protect children, like me and my new baby sister." Learn more about Levi and 21 *Juliana* plaintiffs [here](#).

The following organizations expressed their support for the Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution:

"To uphold children's fundamental rights, the United States must act swiftly to stave off the worst effects of the climate crisis, phase out fossil fuel emissions and provide economic opportunity and prosperity for our communities, while securing the future of our children. With severe wildfires, stronger storms, and rising sea levels impacting communities across the U.S. and the world, it is young people who are most impacted by climate chaos in the long run. The U.S. must commit to climate action on behalf of the millions of young people who have demanded action on the climate crisis for current and future generations. 350 is in full support of the Children's Fundamental Climate Rights and Recovery Resolution," says **Natalie Mebane, Associate Director of U.S. Policy of 350.org**.

"Moms understand that climate change is a fundamental threat to our most precious resource: our children. Even as parents are grappling with the enormous health, social, and economic impacts of COVID-19, we know that there is another, more long-term, threat to our children's health and future -- the

climate crisis. Right now, climate-fueled wildfires burn across the West, and climate-fueled storms pummel the Southeast. The urgent need for climate action is literally hitting home. It is time to put our children first, by recognizing that all children deserve a safe and stable future in which they can thrive. The Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery resolution demands that the United States develop a science-based climate recovery plan to meet necessary emissions reduction targets. Moms Clean Air Force and our more than one million members applaud the cosponsors of this important resolution that will ensure our children have a safe and equitable climate future," states **Molly Rauch, Public Health Policy Director of Moms Clean Air Force.**

"As dedicated health professionals who are passionate about climate change, it's clear why the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments supports the Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution. It's vital that we recognize the fundamental rights of children, the disproportionate impacts from climate change on youth, and the need for national climate recovery planning. This resolution does exactly that. We are in a new dawn regarding environmental health in the US and, in fact, globally. We have reached the point where we must act now - to address the many health risks we are all experiencing as a result of climate change and to avoid irreversible climate peril. The future of children in this country and around the world is at stake. It's crucial for the federal government to address the systemic issue of climate change, including ending policies and investments in fossil-fuel energy that cause climate change. We support the Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution because, as nurses, it is our duty to ensure adequate health protections for all people, including those most vulnerable to human-caused climate change, and in advocating for the necessary changes in policies and practices to protect children's health," said **Katie Huffling, RN, MS, CNM, FAAN, Executive Director of Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments.**

"The ties between systemic racism, environmental justice and the climate crisis have never been so clear. This resolution speaks to the children from marginalized communities and families on the frontline. We commend Senator Merkley and Representatives Schakowsky, Jayapal and Rush for their leadership on this resolution to ensure climate justice for our children from *all* communities," said **Dr. Cecilia Martinez, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy.**

"The plaintiffs deserve to have their constitutional claims heard at trial," asserts **Julia Olson, chief legal counsel for [Our Children's Trust](#)**, the nonprofit, public interest law firm behind *Juliana v. United States*. "The Children's Fundamental Rights and Climate Recovery Resolution sends a message that youth's rights must be recognized and the need for a national science-based climate recovery plan is urgent as wildfires rage on, the seas continue to rise, extreme storms and floods worsen, and systemic civil injustices persist. It is now incumbent on the judicial branch to ensure that the fundamental rights of children are protected."

For the full list of more than 50 organizational endorsements and additional statements of support, click [here](#).

Learn more about the 21 *Juliana* plaintiffs [here](#) and the resolution [here](#).

Download the fact sheet [here](#).

Download the Senate Concurrent Resolution [here](#). The House Concurrent Resolution will be posted to the Our Children's Trust website [here](#) when it becomes available.