



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance testimony to the New York State Senate Environmental Conservation Committee in support of the New York State Climate and Community Protection Act (S.2992/A.3876)

February 14, 2019

Good morning Senator Kaminsky and Members of the New York State Senate Environmental Conservation Committee. My name is Annel Hernandez and I am here to testify on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) in support of the New York State Climate and Community Protection Act (S.2992/A.3876).

Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a nonprofit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around issues that threaten the ability of low-income communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to restructure City and State policies to move us toward a just future. Our alliance is a key advocate of strong and equitable renewable energy targets, because many of the communities we represent are overburdened by the clustering of power plants and other polluting infrastructure in their neighborhoods.

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its latest report, cautioning that the world may have as little as 12 years to transform the global economic system to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This will require rapid system transitions in energy, urban infrastructure, and industrial systems – and an unwavering commitment from New York State government. As the years progress and the threats of climate change loom larger, the need for rapid, bold, and holistic approaches to climate and energy policy becomes increasingly essential.

While New York State has made commitments to reduce carbon emissions and increase investments in climate resiliency, progress so far has been slow to reach low-income communities and communities of color. These communities also face many obstacles to participating in the clean energy economy. As utility ratepayers, members of these communities have financially contributed to existing energy efficiency and renewable energy programs in New York State, only to encounter barriers to their own participation or programs that ultimately fail at systematically addressing the root causes of energy insecurity and energy poverty. The massive systems change required to stave off dangerous climate change impacts requires a consideration of the unique vulnerabilities facing environmental justice communities.

Climate justice is based on the principle that frontline communities are most vulnerable to climate change and, therefore, must play an integral role in planning for the renewable and regenerative energy economy. These are communities where climate vulnerabilities intersect with historic patterns of environmental burdens. For example, NYC's twelve most heat vulnerable neighborhoods are predominantly high-poverty areas where residents are majority people of color. The confluence of extreme heat and lack of access to energy efficient buildings is a quiet threat facing low-income people, people of color, and the elderly. Scientists ranked 2017 as one of the hottest years on record in the United States. Extreme heat results in more deaths than any other weather-related event, and projections show that the annual number of heat-related deaths in NYC may reach 3,331 by 2080. As climate change advances, leadership from the frontlines of the crisis becomes increasingly important to shape policies and to ensure the radical transformation of our energy and economic systems does not leave historically marginalized people behind.

The Climate and Community Protection Act (CCPA) includes several key provisions to support a Just Transition to a clean and renewable energy economy. These provisions were developed by groups in the NY Renews coalition that represent communities around the state from Brooklyn to the Bronx to Buffalo, with input from national experts and broader New York stakeholders. The CCPA makes our state climate and energy commitments legally binding across all sectors including energy, buildings, and transportation, and sets us on a path to 100% clean renewable energy by 2050.

A vital pillar of the CCPA is that it creates a process to ensure that at least 40% of state energy and climate funds are allocated towards vulnerable, impacted, historically disadvantaged, and frontline communities. Disproportionate climate risks and energy burden can be ameliorated through equitable energy policies and targeted strategic investments. Solutions like community-owned solar and energy efficiency will be maximized by the passage of the CCPA. To ensure we meet these targets, the CCPA also requires all state agencies to evaluate the climate and equity impacts of their decisions and ensure that they are fulfilling these dual mandates. The CCPA also mandates that greenhouse gas emission reduction requirements also address co-pollutants, including criteria pollutants and fine particulate matter, in disadvantaged communities.

Furthermore, the CCPA mandates state agencies to develop an 'equity screen' along with the bill's 'climate screen'. The equity screen would be a set of principles and policies that guide agency decision-making to ensure that they consider equity outcomes alongside climate outcomes, including mapping targeted communities, developing and tracking metrics of progress, and requiring agencies to promulgate regulations in line with the equity screen and to involve meaningful public input.

We've seen the devastation that worsening Superstorms have brought to Houston, Florida, Puerto Rico, and here in New York City – and we cannot wait any longer to act. Our health, our economy, and our communities are at risk. We commend the State Senate for elevating and prioritizing the Climate and Community Protection Act (**S.2992/A.3876**). New York State must support clean, renewable energy that protects the health of our families and creates new jobs. We need to put the health of our communities – and our State – ahead of polluters' profits and our outdated and dangerous dependency on fossil fuels.