

Environment & Energy Report



The Manhattan skyline seen from the Brooklyn borough of New York, in September 2020.

Photographer: Michael Nagle/Bloomberg via Getty Images

New York Adds Low-Income Towers to Clean Buildings Law

Nov. 17, 2020, 4:28 PM



- New law protects low-income residents from pass-through costs
- Advocates say law sets example for other cities



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Reporter



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) signed a [bill](#) Tuesday to include large residential buildings with 35% or fewer affordable housing units in its clean buildings law.

New York's success in protecting both the climate and low-income residents establishes a model for other cities to follow, said Sonal Jessel, a policy and advocacy coordinator at West Harlem Environmental Action Inc., also known as WE ACT for Environmental Justice.

The idea of including low-income residential buildings in New York's [clean buildings law](#) wasn't part of the early discussions on the legislation, for fear that landlords could pass on the costs of compliance to low-income residents, Jessel said.

But it became feasible after the city passed another [law](#) last year that prevents building owners from passing to tenants the costs of major capital improvements, Jessel said.

"We don't consider it a success if we reduce emissions by 100% if it means all low-income folks, Black and Latino people, don't have a place to live in New York City," Jessel said. "That is a failure to us."

Local Law 97 requires buildings larger than 25,000 square feet to reduce their carbon emissions by varying amounts or face fines, starting in 2024. The city has set a goal of cutting building greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030, and by 80% by 2050, compared to 2005 levels.

Some New York property owners [say the rules](#) would impose heavy costs that could be even more onerous now that the coronavirus has battered the economy, driving out commercial and residential tenants across the city.

The law signed on Tuesday applies to between 1,000 and 2,000 new buildings across New York City.