EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO POWER CHANGE
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NYCHA: Healthy Homes Campaign
Policy Type: Policy Platform; Advocacy
Status: In Development

PROBLEM: In 2020 and 2021, WE ACT’s Healthy Homes Working Group (HHWG) is engaging with residents across Northern Manhattan on issues related to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), environmental health, and environmental justice. Historically, NYCHA’s poor building infrastructure and other issues related to operations and accountability has negatively impacted the health and safety of NYCHA residents. The two main issues that the HHWG has decided to pursue are resident safety and security and NYCHA operations, which include issues around policing, lead, mold, infrastructure, and other important topics.

SOLUTION: As a response to all of the environmental health injustices in NYCHA, the HHWG is creating a policy platform that will uplift the voices of residents and highlight the two issues that residents have chosen to prioritize, including safety and security and NYCHA operations. In the context of the 2021 mayoral election, the group will mobilize around this platform, participate in lobby day events, and host candidate forums, town halls, and other events that will inform, inspire, and organize residents to advocate for solutions to these issues. This group will also work with mayoral candidates and other elected officials to secure their endorsement of this platform of improving NYCHA developments for the residents who currently live there.

Improve NYC Cooling Center Program (Intro 1563)
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: In Committee

PROBLEM: New York City Cooling Centers are public facilities to which people can go to cool down on an extremely hot day. They are important because they provide a space for anyone to protect themselves against the negative health impacts of heat, especially as the number of extremely hot days increases in frequency and severity due to climate change. However, the Cooling Center program has not been working as well as we would like. Often times, they are hard to find, don’t provide food and water, don’t have functioning air conditioning, or don’t have staff members to help people if they are experiencing heat stress.

SOLUTION: WE ACT will work with the Chair of the City Council’s Environmental Committee Costa Constantinides to ensure a NYC Cooling Center bill will hold the City accountable for providing good quality cool spaces that function properly and provide people with the heat relief they need. WE ACT has been working on this bill for many years and now in the final stages to get it passed in 2020.

Expand the Climate Mobilization Act (Local Law 97 of 2019) by Passing Introduction 1947 and Track Its Implementation
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Passed by City Council; Awaiting Mayor’s Signature

PROBLEM: In 2019, the New York City Council passed a landmark law that will lead to significant emissions reductions in the city’s largest polluting source: buildings. This law, Local Law 97 (LL97), mandates that buildings larger than 25,000 square feet have to cut their emissions by 80 percent by 2050. However, buildings with any affordable housing units in them were left out of the law, as a way to protect lower income tenants from dealing with major rent increases from landlords seeking to pass on the
cost of compliance. While LL97 will be great for reducing pollution, we don’t want buildings with rent regulated apartments to be left out of the benefits of energy efficiency and reduced air pollution. And we want as many buildings as possible to reduce their pollution so we can combat the climate crisis.

**SOLUTION:** Right around the same time that LL97 passed in 2019, New York State passed new rent laws protecting tenants from those aforementioned rent increases. We want to go back to LL97 and expand the number of buildings that have to reduce their emissions. Introduction 1947 expands LL97 to include buildings that have 35 percent or less rent regulated apartments. This new law will add thousands of buildings to the list of those required to reduce their emissions under LL97, leading to better air quality, more energy efficient homes, and combating climate change all at once.

**Renewable Rikers Act (Intro 1591, 1592, 1593)**

**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Laid Over in Committee

**PROBLEM:** New Yorkers know that the time to switch to renewable energy is now, and the more local renewable energy generation we have, the more resilient we’ll be to threats like Superstorm Sandy, which can knock out more centralized energy — generation plants. Furthermore, a warming climate will increase electricity demand in New York City overall as the increase in demand to power summer cooling will outweigh the decrease in power demand for winter warming needs. As a result, the electric system will be increasingly stressed during summer heat waves. Peak loads could increase by 7-12 percent in the 2020s, 8-15 percent in the 2050s, and 11-17 percent in the 2080s. One of the primary limitations on increasing local solar power production in New York City is the limited amount of space with appropriate conditions for solar.

**SOLUTION:** Mayor Bill de Blasio has promised to close the Rikers Island complex. WE ACT and allies like New York Communities for Change will lead the charge to transform Rikers into a solar farm. Decommissioning Rikers provides a rare opportunity to build solar at scale within the five boroughs. Furthermore, WE ACT has trained more than 100 residents of Northern Manhattan in solar panel installation, and many more in 30-hour OSHA training for construction, and wants to train people who were formerly incarcerated to perform the solar installation. We can help employ those who unfairly struggle to find employment while promoting climate resilience and clean air in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. WE ACT will work with the City Council’s Environmental Committee Chair Costa Constantinides to advocate for the introductions that advance this concept.

**Electric School Buses**

**POLICY TYPE:** Policy Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Proposal

**PROBLEM:** New York City’s school bus system transports about 150,000 students daily. Buses are a primary source of air pollution, and developing children are especially vulnerable to the negative health impacts of poor air quality - such as asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, heart attacks, lung cancer, and premature death. A study found that school buses are self-polluting, exposing children on the bus to exhaust levels that were 23 to 46 times higher than those considered to be a significant cancer risk by the Environmental Protection Agency. In fact, the study found that kids on the bus may be exposed to up to four times as much diesel exhaust – a known carcinogen – than someone traveling in a car directly behind that bus.

**SOLUTION:** The electric school buses coalition - made up of members such as New York League of Conservation Voters, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, 350. org, and others - are re-launching a campaign for electric school buses. The coalition proposes to require all new
school buses on the road after 2040 be electric, zero-emission vehicles. The legislation also requires existing buses to be replaced or upgraded after 10 years of use. A program to put electric school buses on the road will lead to a significant reduction in particulate matter emissions and promote a safer environment for children to live, play, and learn.

**Lead in NYC (Intro 864A, Intro 874A)**

**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation; Policy Advocacy  
**STATUS:** In Committee; Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** Lead exposure can cause damage at any age, but is particularly dangerous for young children. Though lead exposure has been declining in New York City for more than a decade, in 2019 the New York City Comptroller’s office identified a severe lack of enforcement for Local Law 1, passed in 2004, which was aimed to eradicate childhood lead poisoning by 2010. The report found that 11,972 children diagnosed with lead exposure (5 mcg/dL or greater) were living in housing and urban development (HUD) apartments that should have been lead-free a long time ago.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT is working with our allies around New York City to fight against this continuing lead poisoning crisis in our communities and city. Firstly, WE ACT is a leading member of the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP), and we anchor a roundtable of the city’s leading lead poisoning prevention advocates, including Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, New York City League of Conservation Voters, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Cooper Square Committee, Montefiore Hospital, and Legal Aid Society, to name a few. The advocates are working on several fronts to ensure that New Yorkers are protected from the scourge of lead poisoning — working with the City Council to improve a multitude of lead poisoning prevention bills and advocating for tougher enforcement of the existing lead poisoning prevention law, Local Law 1 of 2004. Furthermore, WE ACT is working with our allies to draft and advance bills that improve or fill gaps in existing law. Since 2019, the roundtable group has helped get 15 bills passed to improve lead poisoning prevention policies in New York City, with five more passed since. And we have two major bills we are working to get passed in 2020. Introduction 864A mandates the City to inspect not just a child’s home for lead if that child has an elevated blood lead level, but other places the child spends a lot of time. Introduction 874A increases oversight and enforcement over lead dust - a key source of exposure - in construction sites.

**Maximum Allowable Temperature in Buildings**  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Proposal

**PROBLEM:** As the climate crisis worsens, there will be more extremely hot days. Many residents of low-income communities and communities of color do not have access to air conditioning, or cannot afford air conditioning for their homes, and therefore are forced to live and sleep in dangerously warm indoor temperatures, which are often compounded by the urban heat island effect. According to a 2017 report, there are about 13 heatstroke deaths per year, over 100 deaths “from natural causes exacerbated by extreme heat” and more than 450 “heat-related emergency department visits” in New York City. We know there is an injustice here, because 50 percent of the heat-related deaths in New York City are Black/African American people, even though they make up only 25% percent of the city’s population. Currently, it is difficult to require landlords to cool apartments because the infrastructure is not already in
place; a majority of apartments are heated by boilers, which don’t have cooling capacity.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT is leading the advocacy and policy to protect vulnerable New Yorkers from extreme heat impacts. This work includes advocating the City to implement maximum indoor temperature regulations for apartments and homes in New York City. This policy would mirror existing City laws that have minimum indoor temperatures of 68° F for apartments when the external temperatures dip below 55° F. WE ACT’s state-level policy advocacy for building electrification will provide the infrastructure needed for landlords to be able to heat and cool homes with one system.

**Climate Works for All Coalition Post-Crisis Stimulus Policy Platform**

**POLICY TYPE:** Policy Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Proposal

**PROBLEM:** The COVID-19 pandemic has hit communities of color and low-income communities the hardest. People in communities with environmental justice concerns are having more severe cases of COVID-19 due to the cumulative impacts of exposure to hazards such as air pollution over their lifespan. Not only are these communities hit harder by the virus, but they are hit harder by its impacts, such as unemployment. For example, according to the Community Service Society, unemployment rates among Black New Yorkers is about 24%, but only 14% for White New Yorkers.

**SOLUTION:** To support and uplift these communities hardest hit by the pandemic, the Climate Works for All (CW4A) Coalition is a coalition of labor, community, environmental justice, and faith-based organizations all working together to fight climate change and ensure a just transition and fair economy for workers and low-income communities. CW4A has released a policy platform for getting our communities back to work and re-stimulating our city by making bold steps on climate change. The platform outlines how to provide good jobs through investments in retrofitting and energy efficiency in buildings, clean public transportation, public waste management, local manufacturing, and more. As a member of CW4A, WE ACT will be working with City elected representatives and agencies to enact these policy proposals.
Energy Efficiency, Equity, and Jobs Act (Senate Bill S8052)
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: In Committee

PROBLEM: Energy use in the home is a key contributor to climate change and environmental health challenges. Energy efficiency is a key element in mitigating climate change as well as for improving environmental health and economic well-being. However, energy efficiency programming in New York State inadequately serves people of color and low-income. These groups pay more of their income for energy and live in disproportionately substandard and inefficient homes. In addition, energy efficiency jobs represent a fast-growing industry statewide, but training for those jobs isn’t readily available in communities with low-income and people of color.

SOLUTION: WE ACT is working with statewide grassroots groups and policy experts to pass the Energy Efficiency, Equity, and Jobs Act. This bill will require energy efficiency retrofit money be deployed to low-income and communities of color. It will require the state to allocate worker training funds for energy efficiency in these communities statewide, and require the State energy agency to track actual benefits of energy efficiency retrofit work.

Out of Gas, In with Justice
POLICY TYPE: Proposal
STATUS: In Development

PROBLEM: New York has a legislative mandate to decarbonize its economy by 2050, but it has yet to commit to building sector policies. In addition, the state’s utilities continue to expand natural gas and increase sales, which make it increasingly difficult to achieve this goal. And there is increasing evidence that the harmful indoor air pollution from cooking with gas can exacerbate respiratory conditions like asthma.

SOLUTIONS: WE ACT organized Out of Gas, In with Justice as a practice and policy change collaboration with a goal of eliminating the use of natural gas in multi-family affordable housing, including public housing, in New York State through a phased approach with a final shut-off goal of 2040. By incorporating research, a dual-city pilot program, educational workshops, and outreach materials, constituents will increase knowledge of the health and climate impacts of gas used in housing and advance policy initiatives.

NYCHA: Blueprint for Change
POLICY TYPE: Improvement Plan
STATUS: Proposal

PROBLEM: The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) has proposed A Blueprint for Change to create a Public Housing Preservation Trust. The State-created Public Trust would allow New York City to renovate NYCHA buildings and move residents from living under Section 9 housing law to Section 8 housing law, under which residents have less ownership of their apartments and fewer rights to protest injustices - including environmental injustices - commonly found in NYCHA properties.

SOLUTION: Over the past year, WE ACT’s HHWG has collaborated with New York City housing and environmental justice coalitions to address the impacts that the Blueprint plan will have on residents. These groups are also working on a healthy homes campaign to address environmental health injustices such as lead, mold, elevator issues, safety and security, and NYCHA operations - all of which will be impacted by the Blueprint plan. WE ACT will continue to uplift the voices of residents, and advocate for the health and rights of NYCHA residents in light of any changes that the Blueprint will bring.
**Beauty Inside Out: Mercury Out of Skin Lightening Products**  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Proposal

**PROBLEM:** Mercury is a dangerous, persistent neurotoxin that can cause skin irritation and dizziness as well as cognitive and psychological damage. Mercury is used under various different names as a preservative in creams designed to lighten skin color. These products are primarily used by Black and brown people.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT is working with New York State Assemblymember Carmen De La Rosa to introduce and pass a bill that would ban mercury from all skin lightening products sold in the state. This work is part of WE ACT’s Beauty Inside Out Campaign, which is working to get toxic chemicals out of beauty products that are disproportionately used by young women of color.

**Environmental Justice Law Implementation**  
**POLICY TYPE:** Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** At the end of 2019, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the important Environmental Justice Law, which is part of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. This law will create a permanent environmental justice advisory group in the Department of Environmental Conservation, giving environmental justice communities a seat at the proverbial table. Now that this bill has been signed into law, it is important to track its implementation.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT will monitor the establishment and the functioning of the advisory group, which will monitor compliance of environmental justice policies of State agencies.

**Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Tracking Implementation**  
**POLICY TYPE:** Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** In 2019, New York State passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), an ambitious climate action law directing the state to reduce greenhouse gas emission by 85 percent by 2050. In the early stage of the law, it is important to ensure that the State implements it effectively, and with a focus on environmental justice communities.

**SOLUTION:** As a participant on the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s Climate Action Council, WE ACT will help build the Scoping Plan for how to achieve these ambitious climate action goals. And as a member of the State’s Climate Justice Working Group, WE ACT will advise the Climate Action Council on incorporating the needs of environmental justice communities in the Scoping Plan.

**Lead Free New York**  
**POLICY TYPE:** Proposals (Budget, Legislative, Regulations); Advocacy  
**STATUS:** In Development

**PROBLEM:** New York has more children with elevated blood lead levels than any other state in the U.S. The primary exposure pathway for most children is through lead paint and dust in housing, along with lead water pipes (which are more common outside New York City).
SOLUTION: WE ACT is joining other allies on the Lead Free New York Campaign to address these issues through coalition building, grassroots mobilization, policy development, and messaging. The goal is to lower the blood level action threshold in New York State.

**Toxic Chemicals in Everyday Products**

**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** To Be Signed by Governor

**PROBLEM:** Toxic substances in many everyday products have been linked to reproductive and developmental effects, liver and kidney disruption, immunological disruption, low infant birth weights, increased cholesterol, and cancer. Environmental justice communities are at the greatest risk of PFAS exposure via inexpensive food packaging and products.

**SOLUTION:** As part of the Just Green Partnership, WE ACT endorses bills that would prohibit the manufacture, sale, and distribution of toxic chemicals from products, such as the Amendment to Reduce PFAS Chemicals in Food Packaging, which has passed the New York State legislature and is awaiting the Governor’s signature.

**Expanding and Improving the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)**

**POLICY TYPE:** Budget; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** New York City is particularly susceptible to rising temperatures because its physical design characteristics amplify the urban heat island effect. On average, there are more than 100 heat related deaths, and approximately 450 hospitalizations or ER visits due to extreme heat exposure per year in New York City. Given that heat is the deadliest form of weather, having a cool home is the best way to protect individuals from heat-related illness and death. However, low-income households and households of color in particular struggle to access and afford the energy required to stay safe from extreme temperatures in their homes.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT is working with allies and New York State to improve the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). WE ACT is advocating for increased funding to not only expand access to air conditioners, but to also subsidize electricity bills and fund cooling in a heat crisis. In addition, we are asking LIHEAP to develop an online application, permanently impose the medical waiver, and expand the Weatherization Assistance Program to install heat pumps in low-income housing. LIHEAP advocacy is part of WE ACT’s new Heat, Health, and Equity Initiative.

**Climate Education in New York State (Senate Bills S6837 & S6877)**

**Senate Bill S6837, S6877**  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** In Committee

**PROBLEM:** While many New York State K-12 school standards relate to the topic of climate change, there is no requirement for educators to teach about climate change in schools. Without education that focuses on issues related to climate injustices, future New Yorkers will be even more unprepared for a shifting climate.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT will work with other stakeholders in education to pursue legislation that supports climate education initiatives that are centered in justice. Senate bill S6837 will guide development of climate change education in schools by creating a grant program, from amounts annually appropriated, for school districts, boards of cooperative educational services, and community-based organizations to conduct education programs aimed at increasing climate change literacy in students. Senate bill 6877 will require the adoption of climate science in high schools, at the request of the Commissioner of Education.
**Environmental Protection Fund**

**POLICY TYPE:** Budget; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** New York State has a fund for capital projects that protect the environment and communities. According to the Department for Environmental Conservation, the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) has provided more than $2.7 billion for a variety of environmental projects over the past 20 years. The EPF has been a critical line of support for protecting clean air and water, parks, programs, and more. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the EPF is in trouble of being slashed.

**SOLUTION:** Along with more than 100 other organizations, WE ACT is urging New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo to maintain the EPF and other crucial funds that protect the environment and our health. In fact, we are asking that the EPF safeguard funds earmarked for environmental justice in particular, given the toll the pandemic has taken on these communities.

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**Transportation Climate Initiative**

**POLICY TYPE:** Policy; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation account for approximately 29 percent of the total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest contributor to the nation’s GHG emissions. In recent years, GHG emissions in the transportation sector increased more in absolute terms than any other sector. The Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) is a regional collaboration of 13 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions that seek to develop a clean energy economy, improve transportation, and reduce carbon emissions in the transportation sector. Unfortunately, the TCI has not grounded equity and health principles that will advance the needs of environmental justice and rural communities.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT will raise awareness among the WE ACT membership and Northern Manhattan community about the TCI process and the importance of transportation health and equity. We will advocate for the TCI policy and implementation to be grounded in both equity and health, benefiting Northern Manhattan and the broader environmental justice community in both New York State and the TCI Region.
Equitable Climate & Energy Legislation

S4401/HR5986: Environmental Justice for All Act;
S4617/HR8271: Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act of 2020
S4513/HR8019: Climate Equity Act of 2020

POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS:
S4401/HR5986: Introduced in the Senate/House; House bill marked-up
S4617/HR8271: Introduced in the Senate/House
S4513/HR8019: Introduced in the Senate/House

PROBLEM: As our nation reckons with systemic racism, our fight for clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment cannot be disentangled from the fight for justice. Environmental racism fuels disparities in environmental and public health and its impacts can be seen across society. Systemic barriers, including redlining, intentional disinvestment, and unregulated pollution, have systematically had devastating impacts on communities of color. That is why we need comprehensive environmental justice legislation. All people have the right to clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment. But for too many, these rights are still unrealized. That injustice, and the cumulative injustices of housing, economic, education, and health care injustice, and others, mean that millions in America have been ignored by our government for generations.

SOLUTION: WE ACT’s Federal Policy Office in Washington, DC has played an integral role in the development of key legislation to address long standing environmental justice issues. Three key bills that our office has - and will continue to promote - include:
• The Environmental Justice for All Act
• The Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Clean Up Act
• The Climate Equity Act

We will work with the key offices in both the House and Senate to reintroduce these key bills and also work to motivate Members not currently sponsoring to support them.

Develop the Green Workforce

HR1315: Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Development Act of 2019

POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Introduced and Mark-Up Held (Passed Committee)

PROBLEM: Policies and investment geared toward decarbonization goals, along with lower manufacturing costs and greater demand for clean energy technology, are altering our nation’s workforce. In 2018, E2 reported that the United States’ clean energy workforce grew 3.6 percent, adding more than 110,000 net new clean energy jobs. Unfortunately, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in 594,347 clean energy sector employees filing for unemployment. In addition, there is a shortage of qualified clean energy employees to install solar and wind. Diversity, recruitment, retention, recent unemployment, and training all must be addressed to develop the green workforce necessary to decarbonize and electrify the U.S. economy and grid.

SOLUTION: WE ACT will advocate for the passing of the Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Development Act of 2019. This act will establish and carry out a comprehensive national program that will improve education and training for jobs in the clean energy sector in order to increase the presence of underrepresented groups in the skilled workforce for such jobs. The bill will provide direct assistance that includes financial assistance, grants, technical assistance, and other forms of assistance to educational institutions, organizations and programs that
serve the green energy economy. The bill also prioritizes energy efficiency and conservation initiatives in K-12 education. In addition, WE ACT will work with a variety of nonprofits across the U.S., under the Blue Collar to Green Collar Development Act of 2019, to establish comprehensive training programs which will improve education and training in jobs focused on green energy.

**Beauty Inside Out: Safe Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Act of 2019 (D-IL-09)**

**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** In Committee

**PROBLEM:** The average American uses roughly 12 personal care products a day, resulting in exposure to an average of 168 unique chemicals. Many of these chemical exposures have been linked to cancer, infertility, miscarriage, poor infant and maternal health outcomes, obesity, asthma, and many other serious health concerns. The number of products used daily is even higher for women of color, who are also disproportionately exposed to more harmful chemicals through personal care products than white women.

**SOLUTION:** The Safe Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Act of 2019 prioritizes environmental justice and would create the first-ever federal grant programs to support the development of safer alternatives to harmful chemicals in professional salon products and products marketed to women of color, and would support research on the marketing and sale of harmful cosmetics to women and girls of color. WE ACT will work in coalition with the Breast Cancer Prevention Partners to engage key caucuses and add sponsors to the bill.

**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); Weatherization Enhancement and Local Energy Efficiency Investment and Accountability Act (D-NY-20)**

**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation; Increase Funding  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** Environmental justice communities are often faced with the difficult decision to ration their energy use during bouts of extreme heat and cold. Lower socioeconomic households face more barriers accessing the energy they need as a result of historic racial inequality and fewer opportunities for economic mobility. This energy burden makes it critical to increase access to affordable utilities. According to the U.S. Census, the national average energy burden for low-income households was 8.6 percent between 2011 and 2016, which is three times greater than for higher income households during that time period. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted low-income families and communities of color, further demonstrates the need for affordable housing and utility assistance.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT will advocate for increasing funding and the scope of these important utility subsidy programs. In the 116th Congress, Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY-20) introduced the HR2041, the Weatherization Enhancement and Local Energy Efficiency Investment and Accountability Act. The bill would reauthorize, and increase funding, for the Department of Energy’s Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). Weatherization is key to driving down the cost of energy bills, especially in low-income households, which are more likely to be energy inefficient.
The bill would also expand WAP to include the installation of renewable energy technologies.

Eliminate the Toxic Threats of PFAS and Lead: PFAS Action Act of 2019 (D-MI-12) & The Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act (D-NJ)

POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Passed the House; Introduced in Senate

PROBLEM: Environmental justice communities are disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals, including PFAS and lead. PFAS are chemicals that hurt human health. The use of PFAS is widespread in the making of products that resist grease, oil, water, and stains. This includes non-stick pans, microwave popcorn bags, raincoats, cosmetics, fire-fighting foam, carpets, food wrappers, and more. Furthermore, PFAS is a major problem on or near military bases, which have a history of using these chemicals in fire-fighting foams. Lead is another toxic chemical, which can be absorbed from paint, water pipes, and construction dust. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “young children, infants, and fetuses are particularly vulnerable to lead because the physical and behavioral effects of lead occur at lower exposure levels in children than in adults.”

SOLUTION: The PFAS Action Act of 2019 is an important first step in mitigating the toxic impact of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The bill requires that the EPA set a national drinking water standard for PFAS/PFOA. Other critical provisions include listing the chemicals as hazardous air pollutants and providing grants for communities whose water systems have been disproportionately exposed to PFAS. The Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act would provide the critical funds for addressing lead poisoning from paint chips and lead service lines. The bill invests $30 billion in identifying and cleaning up homes with lead-based paint. It also provides $20 billion for replacing lead service lines throughout the country.

Invest in Solar Through Environmental Justice & Solar Investment Tax Credit

PROBLEM: Low-income New York City residents pay up to 13 percent of their income on energy costs. Solar both helps these communities to lower their greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change and it also saves money for these people that generally spends a greater portion of their income on energy bills. Solar energy is considered the future for increased energy costs with a lesser damage to the environment but unfortunately, it can
be expensive and therefore only accessible to those with a higher income.

**SOLUTION:** Solar Investment Tax Credits are some of the most important federal mechanisms to support continued growth of solar energy in the U.S. Since the Solar Investment Tax Credit was invented in 2006, The U.S. Solar Industry overall has grown around 10,000 percent. This increase within the industry has created thousands of jobs and stimulated the economy. In 2015, Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) advocated for a multi-year extension of the credit which provided critical stability investors and businesses involved with solar energy. The solar investment tax credit allows for a 26-percent deduction in the cost of installing solar energy systems from one’s federal taxes. Solar Investment Tax Credits have proven to be one of the most important federal policy mechanisms to incentivize the use of clean energy and the development of solar energy across the U.S. We will work with similarly aligned stakeholders to advance legislation and policies that will allow solar companies to fully utilize the Investment Tax Credit (ITC) during this economic crisis. Establish a temporary 100% direct pay program at least for projects placed in service through 2022, to ensure steady financing in the midst of the crisis.

We will also look to advance renewable energy investments that provide necessary funding to environmental justice program and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

The Moving Forward Act contains key solar and storage legislation that the solar industry has lobbied for in the midst of COVID-19, including an extension of the ITC, a direct pay option and a new ITC for storage. This legislation also addresses environmental justice, including by investing boldly in affordable housing, expanding affordable high-speed Internet to underserved rural and urban communities, and ensuring that all have access to clean water. H.R. 2 makes a strong down payment in a clean energy future and solving the climate crisis, as we create millions of good-paying jobs and rebuild our highways, bridges, transit, rail, airports, ports and harbors to improve safety, reduce gridlock and put America on a path to zero pollution. The bill now moves to the Senate. We will work to support the reintroduction of this bill in the 117th Congress.