2022 POLICY AGENDA
Campaigns & Initiatives

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO POWER CHANGE
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Our mission is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and low-income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and equitable environmental health and protection policies and practices. WE ACT stands ready to work with administrators and legislators at every level of government to enact change in places where systemic racism and intentional disinvestment have stymied social cohesion and community vibrancy. Our work is grounded in the following values:

- **Inclusion** — WE ACT facilitates political participation and policy-making that empowers residents to serve as planners and decision-makers, and amplifies the impact of their efforts.
- **Influence** — WE ACT is a pioneering community watchdog that uses our sphere of influence to ensure that policies, practices and investments are just and equitable.
- **Trust** — WE ACT willingly contributes our insights and expertise, and is well-known among academic, advocacy, policy and research collectives at the local, state and national levels.
- **Systems Thinking** — WE ACT understands that environmental, social, economic and public health challenges are intertwined and compounding, and we assess and address community impact in a holistic and systematic way.

WE ACT releases an annual policy agenda that outlines our focus for the upcoming year. Our priorities include:

- Continuing to assess and address the impacts of the climate crisis on communities of color and low-income communities;
- Ensuring government accountability and public participation in decision-making processes;
- Encouraging civic engagement, and securing robust voter rights and protections;
- Resolving the cumulative impacts of exposure to pollution, toxic chemicals and other environmental harms;
- Facilitating a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels, and working to ensure that emergent energy economies are democratic and provide benefits to ratepayers and communities.
Environmental Justice Programs Funding
LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Budget; Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: Local Laws 60 & 64 mandate that City agencies factor environmental justice into decision-making processes. However, due to a lack of financial support for the Environmental Justice Program, there have been many challenges in achieving Program goals. The Mayor’s commitment to environmental justice must be supported, as obstructions and a lack of funding will further exacerbate environmental injustices.

SOLUTION: WE ACT asks that the New York City Council provide annual funding of $1 million to the Environmental Justice Program, starting in fiscal year 2022. This will enable the Mayor’s Office of Climate Policy and Programs to properly execute its plans to consult impacted communities and to do meaningful outreach, as outlined by Section 3-1006-f of Local Law 64 (2017).

Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Implementation
LEVEL: State
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 that calls for an 85 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. To ensure effective implementation in these early stages, it is important that the State focus on environmental justice communities.

SOLUTION: Through our place on the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Climate Action Council, WE ACT will help build the Scoping Plan that will outline how to achieve the climate action goals. As a member of the New York State Climate Justice Working Group, WE ACT will serve as a permanent advisor to the Climate Action Council; our counsel will address how to incorporate the needs of environmental justice communities and map disadvantaged communities to ensure that they receive 35-40 percent of the benefits from emission reduction programs.

S.4264A/A.6967: Climate and Community Investment Act
LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: In Committee

PROBLEM: With its Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), New York State has one of the most ambitious laws in the country to slash greenhouse gas emissions and direct program benefits to historically disadvantaged communities. The Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA) is critical to ensuring that CLCPA is fully and accurately realized, and it is expected to create more than 150,000 green jobs with gold-standard labor provisions that will prioritize communities directly impacted by environmental racism. However, CCIA has no designated funding mechanism or “pay for it” plan, making its implementation uncertain.

SOLUTION: WE ACT is advocating that the CCIA be passed, with $15 billion in annual funding that would come from requiring corporate polluters to pay a fee on their greenhouse gas emissions and other co-pollutants. The CCIA revenue would be used to fund a just transition to a renewable economy; specifically, the money would help low- and moderate-income families pay utility bills, and allow for investments in large-scale local programs around community-owned solar, weatherization, energy-efficiency and infrastructure resiliency.

Environmental Justice Law Implementation
LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: At the end of 2019, former New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the important Environmental Justice Law, which is part of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). 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. This body is critical to ensuring that CLCPA is fully and authentically realized, yet the deadline has passed for instating the Environmental Justice Advisory Group.

SOLUTION: WE ACT will monitor the establishment and the functioning of this advisory group, which will gauge and assess State agency compliance with environmental justice policies.
Justice40 Initiative Implementation
LEVEL: Federal
Policy Type: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: For generations there has been a lack of investment in communities of color, low-income communities, and indigenous communities/tribal lands. The Justice40 Initiative — created within Executive Order 14008, “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad” — states that 40 percent of all benefits from federal investments should go towards disadvantaged and under-resourced communities. Environmental justice communities participate in the Justice40 Initiative through the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council.

SOLUTION: While we applaud the intention of this Initiative and the creation of the Council, robust community input is critical so all voices are heard and direct investments go to communities that are most in need. WE ACT is leading an effort to ensure that Justice40 activities are implemented and tracked throughout the United States; Justice40 goals include building stakeholder and community awareness through communications and strategic partnerships, strengthening the Initiative policies, and developing mechanisms for impactful Initiative oversight and compliance.

National Environmental Policy Act
LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is one of the most critical environmental policies within our current federal policy toolbox. NEPA requires public engagement and environmental review before the implementation of major infrastructure projects, but sadly, implementation has been underfunded, and NEPA has failed to truly engage disadvantaged communities that often lack the resources and knowledge of its processes. In the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Package, the extent of NEPA public engagement was further diminished, and a number of categorical exclusions were added.

SOLUTION: In 2021, WE ACT brought together an ad-hoc coalition of more than 20 organizations to help save NEPA from the aforementioned changes. Our coalition was able to earmark $450 million for NEPA implementation in the Build Back Better Act, a critical step as NEPA is a crucial aspect of the projects that will soon be underway through the Infrastructure Package and Budget Reconciliation. In 2022, WE ACT will continue our NEPA advocacy by working to improve the Act through legislation such as the Environmental Justice for All Act, and continuing to engage in coalition work.

Compliance and Oversight of Reconciliation and Bipartisan Infrastructure Package
LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: Through the creation of new programs and apportioning additional funds to existing programs, the 2021 Build Back Better Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Package are set to affect many areas that are important to environmental justice communities. Additionally, funds from these legislative efforts also are anticipated to abide by the Justice40 initiative, whereby 40 percent of benefits from these federal projects will be directed towards disadvantaged and under-resourced communities. As these new programs roll out and funds are distributed, oversight will be necessary to ensure equity, and rectify policies and practices (both historical and present-day) that have led to disparate outcomes, impacts and opportunities related to health, homes, wealth-building, transportation, toxin exposure, and pollution.

SOLUTION: WE ACT will take an active role in working with the Office of Management and Budget, and the agencies of implementation, to ensure that program funds meet the needs of environmental justice communities. While the infusion of new funds is greatly commended, the level of investment for many environmental justice provisions is not sufficient to reach all communities — in our efforts, WE ACT will advocate for an equitable distribution of funds and continue our efforts to include funding provisions in future appropriation requests and legislation.
Redistricting
LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: Redistricting, the process of drawing legislative districts, occurs every 10 years, following the census. Due to partisan politics, district lines are frequently drawn unfairly, which dilutes the voices of certain constituents who are then underserved by their representatives. Redistricting is an opportunity to update district boundaries to better reflect the reality of communities that may have shifted in the last 10 years.

SOLUTION: WE ACT will take an active role in the redistricting process in Northern Manhattan and activate members to participate in the public process. Through educational workshops, WE ACT will help residents understand how district lines are drawn, create their own district maps that reflect representative and fair community boundaries, and testify at public hearings. Members can then harness these redistricting touchpoints to extend community-building work and control how future elections are shaped.

S.2747 Freedom to Vote Act of 2021
HR.4 John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021
LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: Voter disenfranchisement is a pressing issue that literally and existentially threatens the American democracy specifically, and democratic norms and tenets, overall. Communities of color, low-income communities and Indigenous/tribal communities have been systematically shut out and deterred from robust participation in elections; as a result, policymakers often, and by design, do not lobby for the needs of the communities they “represent.” Distrust in the government has been another detrimental outcome of widespread and targeted voter disenfranchisement efforts.

SOLUTION: Bills that expand voting provisions, and reverse and halt voter disenfranchisement efforts, are critical to cultivating community participation and advancing environmental justice policy. WE ACT (in coalition) will champion two critical bills:

● Freedom to Vote Act of 2021: The Freedom to Vote Act is one of the most expansive voting rights bills; key provisions include making election day a national public holiday, allowing for states to do mail-in voting, online voter registration, automatic voter registration, and restoring voting rights for formerly incarcerated individuals. (The Freedom to Vote Act is a revised version of the For the People Act that reflects and incorporates updated definitions informed by community feedback.)

● John R. Lewis Advancement Act: The John R. Lewis Advancement Act works to ensure that states with a history of voting rights violations must undergo Department of Justice review before changing their voting laws. The John R. Lewis Advancement Act is an important, functional complement to the Freedom to Vote Act; in order for the For the People Act to achieve its aims, states that have a history of voting right violations must be forestalled from introducing new voting rights laws that circumvent federal protections.

Moving forward, WE ACT will include these critical voting rights bills in our congressional scorecard.
**Cumulative Exposure**

**S.1031B/A.2103A: Cumulative Impacts Analysis Requirements**

**S.3211A/A.6530: Public Participation Requirements**

**LEVEL:** State  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Passed Senate; In Committee in Assembly

**PROBLEM:** The exposure to many environmental hazards at once is what hurts health; WE ACT refers to this compounded harm as “cumulative impacts,” and it is a cornerstone issue in the environmental justice movement. Communities of color and low-income communities often are exposed to multiple environmental hazards because polluting facilities have been sited in their neighborhoods, affecting multiple generations.

**SOLUTION:** With allies, WE ACT is advocating for two New York State bills to combat this issue by revising the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process. The first bill will require any agency seeking a facility permit to prove that its siting is not adding to existing public health or environmental burden. The second bill adds more teeth to public participation requirements for the SEQR process, mandating that permit-seekers listen and respond to the public as a condition of receiving a permit. Both bills note that permits can be denied if the applicant fails to meet the stipulations.

**Equitable Climate & Energy Legislation**

**S.872/HR.2021: Environmental Justice For All Act**

**S.2476: Environmental Justice Air Quality Monitoring Act of 2021**

**LEVEL:** Federal  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works

**PROBLEM:** All people have the right to clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment. But for too many, these rights are still unrealized. Systemic barriers, including redlining, intentional disinvestment, and unregulated pollution, have had devastating impacts on communities of color and low-income communities. These injustices, and the cumulative, magnifying impacts of housing, economic, education, health care, and other injustices, mean that millions in America have been ignored by our government for generations. That is why we need comprehensive environmental justice legislation.

**SOLUTION:** The WE ACT Federal Policy Office in Washington, D.C. has played an integral role in the development of key legislation intended to address long-standing environmental justice issues. We will work with the key offices in both the House and Senate to reintroduce two essential bills (following) and elicit support from Members who currently are not sponsors.

- The Environmental Justice for All Act would apply a cumulative impact approach to federal decision-making that increases community engagement and allows for disproportionate environmental burdens to be tried as Civil Rights violations.
- The Environmental Justice Air Quality Monitoring Act, which creates a neighborhood-block-level air quality monitoring program under the EPA. This law is necessitated by the lack of air quality monitors in many communities, in particular environmental justice communities, which results in publicly available pollution data that underrepresents the extent of air pollution.

**Multi-Pollutant Power Plant Standards**

**LEVEL:** Federal  
**POLICY TYPE:** Regulation; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** Despite air protections under the Clean Air Act, coal and gas power plants are the largest stationary source of air pollution in the country. It has been more than 30 years since the Act was last updated. Power plants continue to spew out greenhouse gas emissions and toxic air pollutants that adversely affect the climate and human health. Low-income groups, Indigenous populations, and people of color living near these plants are unduly burdened by climate impacts and health harms from exposure to fossil fuel pollution and have disproportionate and increasing cases of lung and heart illness, emergency room visits, and premature death.

**SOLUTION:** As part of the Climate Action Campaign Regulatory Task Force, WE ACT will be urging the Biden Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to finalize and promulgate a suite of aggressive and enforceable standards that target reductions in greenhouse gas and set air pollutant criteria by the end of 2022. We will mobilize environmental, public health, faith-based, environmental justice and grassroots organizations to carry out a public campaign that outlines these new pollution control standards and calls for investments in zero-emission, renewable energy as well as energy storage, especially within overburdened communities.
Energy

Energy Democracy

Renewable Rikers Act (Local Laws 16, 17, and 31 of 2021)
LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Enacted

PROBLEM: New Yorkers know that the time to switch to renewable energy is now, especially in light of threats like Superstorm Sandy that knocked out centralized energy-generation plants. Yet one of the primary limitations on increasing local solar power production is the limited amount of space with appropriate conditions.

SOLUTION: As a member of the Renewable Rikers Coalition, WE ACT helped get the Act passed into law. Now, we will advocate for and monitor the Act implementation, which enjoins that as the prison closes, the Department of Correction relinquish Rikers Island jurisdiction to the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, and requires the city to study how renewable energy and wastewater treatment facilities can be placed on the island. Furthermore, WE ACT has trained more than 100 residents of Northern Manhattan in solar panel installation, and we want to train people who were formerly incarcerated to perform the solar installation.

S.6453/A.1466A: New York Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA)
LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Advocacy
STATUS: In Committee in Senate and Assembly

PROBLEM: The New York Power Authority (NYPA), the largest public power utility in the country, is a great resource for renewable energy solutions; right now, it is the lowest-cost electricity supplier in the state, and hydropower (a renewable resource) represents 70 percent of all its production. But there are major restrictions on what NYPA can do — for instance, NYPA legally is not allowed to own or build new utility-scale renewable energy projects, nor is it allowed to directly sell energy to individual households. This is a huge barrier to increasing renewable energy and keeping down energy costs.

SOLUTION: WE ACT believes that energy is for the people, and as such, energy systems should be controlled by publicly-owned and democratically accountable entities. Through participation in two major state-wide coalitions (the New York Energy Democracy Alliance and Public Power NY), WE ACT is advocating for the passage of the New York Build Public Renewables Act, legislation that would allow the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to own and build new renewable energy projects, including the generation, storage and transmission of renewables. This is one of the most important first steps in achieving public power statewide and making sure that energy systems are clean, affordable, healthy and resilient.

Energy Efficiency

S.3126B/A.3996B: Energy Efficiency, Equity, and Jobs Act
LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Passed Senate; In Committee in Assembly

PROBLEM: Energy use in the home is a key contributor to climate change and health issues due to exposure to toxic fumes that cause respiratory illness. Energy efficiency is a key element in mitigating climate change, and improving environmental health and economic well-being, however, energy efficiency programme inadequately serves people of color and low-income individuals. In addition, energy efficiency jobs represent a fast-growing industry statewide, but job training isn’t readily available in these disadvantaged communities.

SOLUTION: WE ACT is working with grassroots groups and policy experts to pass the Energy Efficiency, Equity, and Jobs Act. This bill will require that energy-efficiency retrofit monies be deployed to low-income communities and communities of color. It will require the state to allocate worker training funds, and the State energy agency must track actual benefits of energy efficiency retrofit work.
Improve NYC Cooling Center Program
LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: New York City Cooling Centers are public facilities where people can go on extremely hot days. As the number of extremely hot days increases in frequency and severity due to climate change, cooling centers are important because they offer protection from the negative health impacts of heat. However, the Cooling Center program has not been working optimally; oftentimes, locations are hard to find, they don’t provide food and water or have functioning air conditioning, or they aren’t adequately staffed to assist people who are experiencing heat stress.

SOLUTION: In 2022, WE ACT will continue our advocacy for cooling centers and hold the City accountable for providing good quality spaces that function properly and provide people with all-encompassing heat relief. WE ACT has partnered with the Yale University School of Public Health to conduct Institutional Review Board-approved research on the cooling center program efficacy as a response to the public health risk of extreme heat — audits of cooling centers in Northern Manhattan conducted by WE ACT members during the 2021 summer will inform our final report and policy recommendations.

Expanding and Improving the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
LEVEL: State & Federal
POLICY TYPE: Budget; Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: Heat is the deadliest form of weather. Given its urban heat island design and attributes, New York City is particularly susceptible to the effects of rising temperatures. On average, extreme heat exposure in New York City has resulted in more than 100 heat-related deaths, and approximately 450 hospitalizations or ER visits, per year.

SOLUTION: Cool homes are the best defense against heat-related illness and death, yet low-income households and households of color, in particular, struggle to access and afford the energy required to outfit their homes for extreme temperatures. As part of our Heat, Health, and Equity Initiative, WE ACT is working with allies and New York State to improve the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), advocating for increased funding to expand access to air conditioners, subsidize electricity bills, and equip cooling centers to function during heat crises.
Public Housing

**NYCHA: Healthy Homes Campaign**

**LEVEL:** City  
**POLICY TYPE:** Policy Platform; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** In Development

**PROBLEM:** Historically, the health and safety of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents have been negatively impacted by poor building infrastructure and other issues related to operations and accountability. In 2022, the WE ACT Healthy Homes Working Group (HHWG) will engage with residents across Northern Manhattan on issues related to environmental health and environmental justice; specifically, HHWG will investigate resident safety and security, and NYCHA operations, such as policing, lead, mold, infrastructure, and other important topics.

**SOLUTION:** As a response to NYCHA environmental health injustices, the aforementioned policy platform will elevate resident voices and highlight the two issues that residents have chosen to prioritize: safety and security, and NYCHA operations. Additionally, the HHWG will continue to advocate for protections around the NYCHA Blueprint for Change, a set of ideas set forth by the agency to improve the living conditions in its developments. The HHWG also is organizing to insist that NYCHA be accountable to the vibrant and active community of residents who want greater oversight and direction related to improvement plans.

Building Decarbonization/Electrification

**Gas Free NYC**

**LEVEL:** City  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** In Committee; Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** Fossil fuel combustion in buildings produces air pollution that accelerates climate change, contributes to increasingly extreme weather events, and kills nearly 1,000 New Yorkers every year. Furthermore, every new building that installs a gas (or oil) boiler or furnace locks in decades of new air pollution from fossil fuels. The neighborhoods with the worst air quality and highest rates of illness from air pollution are predominantly communities of color, with Black people facing 32 percent higher exposure. The health impacts of this disproportionate exposure can be seen in the higher rates of mortality and morbidity including chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT is co-leading the #GasFreeNYC coalition that is advocating for the passage of Intro 2317, a bill that would end gas use in newly-constructed buildings and push for energy efficiency standards that utilize renewable energy (instead of polluting gas boilers) and rely on clean, new technologies, such as heat pumps. Intro 2317 will reduce air pollution, which will help address the health disparities experienced by people of
color. This bill would also create new jobs in clean-energy design and construction, and would cut climate-threatening emissions by millions of metric tons.

Local Law 97 and Climate Mobilization Advisory Board
LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Implementation

PROBLEM: In New York City, buildings account for about 70 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, making that infrastructure the most significant contributor to the climate crisis locally. To address this issue, in 2019, the New York City Council passed a landmark law mandating that buildings larger than 25,000 square feet have to cut their emissions 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050. While this is a significant step in the right direction, equitable implementation of this law won’t happen naturally: Watchdogs and community representatives must be at the decision-making table.

SOLUTION: WE ACT has a seat at the table on the Climate Mobilization Advisory Board, which provides recommendations to the City Council regarding Local Law 97 implementation (in consultation with dozens of industry experts). We are able to ensure that equity is a constant and significant part of the conversations, and amplify our community’s wants and needs.

Better Buildings NY Coalition and Out of Gas, In with Justice Pilot Project
LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Pilot Program
STATUS: Ongoing; In Process

PROBLEM: New York has a legislative mandate to decarbonize its economy by 2050, but it has yet to determine how this mandate will apply to affordable housing. In addition, state utilities continue to expand natural gas and increase sales, which make it increasingly difficult to achieve the decarbonization goal. And there is increasing evidence that the harmful indoor air pollution from cooking with gas stoves can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma.

SOLUTION: WE ACT is both a founding and steering committee member of Better Buildings NY, a new coalition that will help transition homes and buildings off of “natural” gas and other fossil fuels that are used for heating and cooking in favor of electricity from renewable energy sources. In conjunction, we are leading Out of Gas, In with Justice, a pilot project to study health benefits of going electric, is replacing gas stoves with induction stoves and installing air-source heat pumps in 40 affordable housing homes (20 homes in a Bronx NYCHA complex, 20 homes in Buffalo, and our partners at PUSH Buffalo will helm those efforts). By combining research on air quality, a dual-city pilot program, educational workshops, and outreach materials about the benefits of electrification, we will increase understanding of the health and climate impacts of gas used in housing and advance policy initiatives.
S.1244: Civilian Climate Corps for Jobs and Justice Act (D-MA)
LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Introduced in Senate; Read Twice and Referred to the Committee on Finance

PROBLEM: The Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) would mobilize a new generation to address the threat of climate change and restoration of public lands — President Biden has stated that the CCC is a $10 billion investment that will give paid opportunities, housing, and benefits to a diverse group of people, placing them in good-paying union jobs while building a just and sustainable economy. While the program does encourage diverse recruitment, higher wages and more educational grants, the CCC still does not prioritize the recruitment and inclusion of individuals living in frontline communities.

SOLUTION: WE ACT is working closely with U.S. Representative Adriano Espaillat to amend and draft legislation, and propose the addition of a Frontline Climate Corps that would consist of members from environmental justice communities who want to perform service in their own communities. The Frontline Climate Corps would center Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions, along with K-12 schools, to teach climate education and act as a pipeline to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students who are poised to become our next climate activists. Frontline communities must not be left behind in the just transition, and the creation of the Frontline Climate Corps affords individuals the financial security to remain in and work on behalf of their communities.

Develop the Green Workforce
HR.156, HR.1315: Blue Collar to Green Collar Jobs Development Act 2021 (D-IL-01)
LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Re-Introduced and Referred to the Committee on Education and Labor, in addition to the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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 with the addition of 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 who can 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 2021. 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. The bill will provide direct 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 country to establish comprehensive training and education programs that focus on and improve outcomes in the green energy industry.

Climate Education

S.6837/A9831 & S.6877/A11143: Climate Education in New York State

LEVEL: State
POLICY: Legislation; Advocacy
STATUS: In Committee

PROBLEM: While many New York State K-12 education standards topically relate to climate change, there is no requirement for educators to teach about climate change in schools. Without education that focuses on issues related to the environment and climate injustices, future generations 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 6837 will create a grant program (from amounts annually appropriated for school districts, boards of cooperative educational services, and community-based organizations) that will guide the development of climate change curriculum aimed at increasing student literacy.

HR.29: Supporting the teaching of climate change in schools (D-CA-13)
S.966: Climate Change Education Act (D-MA)

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY: Legislation
STATUS: Introduced in House; Referred to the House Committee on Education and Labor

PROBLEM: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports have sounded the alarm that there will be dire consequences for our planet without an immediate reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. While such reporting raises awareness and serves as a call to action for some, many people still do not see climate change as an urgent threat. More than three-quarters of Americans want schools to teach about climate change, but many teachers do not feel equipped to undertake this multi-disciplinary issue.

SOLUTION: WE ACT is a key member of the Coalition for Climate Education Policy, which seeks to advance climate literacy at the national level. As part of our Environmental Health and Justice Leadership Training program, WE ACT has created and facilitated curriculum with public, charter, and private schools. We also co-lead a statewide coalition focused on strategies for implementing climate justice-centered education standards in K-12 schools. We aim to ensure that young people across the country, especially those in communities of color, low-income communities, and environmental justice communities, are prepared to think critically around both climate and environmental injustices.
**East Harlem Waterfront**

**LEVEL:** City  
**POLICY TYPE:** Advocacy  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**PROBLEM:** It is well documented and known to many city agencies that East Harlem is vulnerable to flooding from extreme rain, sea level rise, and storm surge — according to Federal Emergency Management Agency flood maps, the neighborhood sits directly in a high-risk zone. Residents have been consistently vocal about flooded streets, and for more than a decade, East Harlem communities have been promised plans and funds to make neighborhoods more resistant to flooding. The majority of the residents in the most at-risk areas are Black and Latinx, and among the most economically disadvantaged individuals in New York City.

**SOLUTION:** WE ACT will continue to advocate that East Harlem and equitable implementation be part of the Department of City Planning “New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan.” In addition, we will track and monitor the progress of East Harlem Esplanade repairs which received $284 million for which the City apportioned funding in 2021. WE ACT is also an active steering committee member of the Rise to Resilience coalition, comprised of a diverse group of advocates who collectively call on our federal, state, and local governments to urgently prioritize climate resilience and hazard mitigation.

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**Environmental Protection Fund**

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

**PROBLEM:** The New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) is earmarked for capital projects that protect the environment and communities. Since its inception in 1993, the Fund has provided more than $4 billion for a variety of environmental projects, and has been a critical line of support for protecting clean air, water, parks, programs, and more.

**SOLUTION:** Last year, the EPF was funded at $300 million. WE ACT, along with more than 100 other organizations in the Clean Water and Jobs Coalition, is urging Governor Kathy Hochul to fund the EPF at $500 million this year to protect the environment and our health. In fact, given the toll the climate crisis has taken on our communities, we are asking that the EPF safeguard funds that have been earmarked for environmental justice.

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**The New York State Bond Act**

**LEVEL:** State  
**POLICY TYPE:** Ballot Measure; Advocacy  
**STATUS:** On November 2022 Ballot

**PROBLEM:** The New York State Environmental Bond Act could issue $4 billion in general obligation bonds for climate change mitigation, parks and conservation, clean water, and flood risk reduction. To unlock the funds, voters must approve the ballot measure in November 2022.

**SOLUTION:** Along with the Clean Water and Jobs Coalition, WE ACT will be advocating for the adoption of the Bond Act. This significant source of funding will be vital for pursuing climate change mitigation and adaptation projects that will help us better prepare for devastating weather events like Hurricane Ida.
Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Products

**S.3331A/A.143: The Cosmetics Right to Know Act**

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

**PROBLEM:** There are many toxic chemicals in personal care products (ex. soaps and cosmetics), and 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. In particular, due to heavy targeted marketing and the societal elevation of white beauty standards, young women of color have high rates of use of such harmful products.

**SOLUTION:** As co-chair of the JustGreen Partnership, a coalition of 60-plus organizations across New York State working to pass environmental health policies, WE ACT is advocating for the passage of a statewide bill to remove toxic chemicals from some personal care products, and require ingredient disclosures for others. This bill is sponsored by Senator Gustavo Rivera and Assemblymember Richard Gottfried.

**S.501B/A.6296: Child Safe Products Act**

**LEVEL:** State  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Enacted

**PROBLEM:** Adults want children to have toys that are both fun and safe. The UN Environment Programme reported that 25 percent of children’s toys contain harmful chemicals (used to provide elasticity and levels of hardness), and there are other risks related to choking or toxic contaminants. Unfortunately, there are few comprehensive resources that aid in determining toy safety.

**SOLUTION:** The Child Safe Products Act requires the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to publish lists of dangerous chemicals of concern, and high-priority chemicals such as asbestos, lead, mercury, and formaldehyde that can be found in items such as toys, car seats, school supplies, personal care products, furnishings, and apparel. A co-chair of the JustGreen Partnership, WE ACT is advocating for the correct implementation of this law — the DEC must post the full list of chemicals on its website, so for the first time, parents, families and caregivers will have access to this information.

**Beauty Inside Out: Mercury Out of Skin Lightening Products**

**LEVEL:** State  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Proposal

**PROBLEM:** Mercury is used as a preservative in creams designed to lighten skin color. A dangerous, persistent neurotoxin, mercury can cause symptoms such as skin irritation and dizziness, as well as cognitive and psychological damage and impairment; additionally, there is great variation in how mercury is named and noted on product labels. The Minamata Convention on Mercury establishes a 1mg/kg, (1ppm) for skin lightening products, and while many states and brands have already begun prohibiting the sale of cosmetics that contain mercury, it remains a growing, billion-dollar international industry, targeted almost wholly at people of color.

**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. The Mercury Out of Skin Lightening Products bill would ban the distribution and sale of any mercury-containing cosmetics, toiletries, and fragrances in stores and on the internet. The bill also would mandate that manufacturers clearly and conspicuously disclose the levels of mercury in their products. This work is part of the WE ACT Beauty Inside Out Campaign, which is working to get toxic chemicals out of beauty products that are disproportionately used by young people of color.

**Safer Beauty Bills Package**

**LEVEL:** Federal  
**POLICY TYPE:** Legislation  
**STATUS:** Ongoing

**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.
SOLUTION: WE ACT will work in coalition with the Breast Cancer Prevention Partners to engage key caucuses and add sponsors to the bill. The Safer Beauty Bill Package contains four new bills that will be introduced in Congress:

- Toxic-Free Beauty Act
- Cosmetic Supply Chain Transparency Act
- Cosmetic Fragrance and Flavor Ingredient Right to Know Act
- Cosmetic Safety for Communities of Color and Professional Salon Workers Act

Through these four bills, consumers and beauty industry workers will be able to access and use safer personal care products and reduce their level of chemical exposure. Additionally, the bills also impose an ingredient transparency standard to inform consumers.

Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning

Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in NYC

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Policy Advocacy
STATUS: In Drafting; 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 Comptroller’s Office identified a severe lack of enforcement for Local Law 1 (passed in 2004) which 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 a leading member of the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning, and we anchor a roundtable of lead poisoning prevention advocates, including Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, New York City League of Conservation Voters, Cooper Square Committee, and Montefiore Hospital, to name a few. Since 2019, the roundtable group has helped get 17 bills passed to improve lead poisoning prevention policies in New York City. We are working with the roundtable to draft and advance six bills that improve or fill gaps in existing law by mandating lead inspections in common spaces of apartment buildings, abating lead on friction surfaces, considering lead poisoning a nuisance, and requiring neuropsychological evaluation of children with lead exposure.

Lead Free Kids New York

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Proposals (Budget, Regulations)
STATUS: In Committees in Assembly and Senate; In Development

PROBLEM: New York has more children with elevated blood lead levels than any other state in the United States. And lead exposure is not only a problem in New York City but statewide; for example, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Buffalo has some of the highest rates of childhood lead poisoning in the nation.

SOLUTION: It is important to have statewide action to prevent childhood lead poisoning. As a steering committee member on the Lead Free Kids New York Coalition, WE ACT is addressing the issue through coalition building, policy development, and messaging. The Coalition is working hard to pass four bills into law:

- Lead in School Drinking Water (passed the legislature but must be signed by the governor)
- Landlord insurance for Lead-Based Paint
- Renovation, Repair and Painting
- Point of Sale Lead Paint Disclosure
**Transportation**

**Introduction 455: Electrify School Buses**
LEVEL: City  
POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Policy Advocacy  
STATUS: Mayor’s Desk for Signature; Ongoing

PROBLEM: 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. In fact, a study found that school buses are self-polluting, exposing passengers and operators to exhaust levels that were 23 to 46 times higher than exposure levels that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers to be a significant risk for cancer. The study also found that operators and school-age passengers 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. Each day, the New York City school bus system transports about 150,000 students.

SOLUTION: The New York City Clean School Bus Coalition, made up of members such as the New York League of Conservation Voters, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, 350.org, and others, has relaunched a campaign for electric school buses by advocating for the passing of Introduction 455. The coalition proposes that after 2035, all school buses on the road be electric, zero-emission vehicles. The legislation also requires existing buses to be replaced or upgraded after 16 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.

**East 125th Street Community Visioning Action Plan**
LEVEL: City & State  
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy  
STATUS: Proposal

PROBLEM: A steadfast anchor for Black social and economic life since the late 1800s, the 125th Street Corridor in New York City has been the birthplace of some of the country’s most prominent cultural, political, and religious movements and icons. Going east, after 5th Avenue, though, the streetscape takes a visible turn, reflecting an overarching pattern of uneven economic growth in the East Harlem section of the corridor. Long viewed as a last bastion of affordability and Latino culture, East Harlem is on the verge of an unprecedented transformation, one that threatens the environmental character and cultural identity of this historic community. Without community-driven solutions, East Harlem will continue to be hit the hardest by the harmful effects of gentrification.

SOLUTION: The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has plans to create a transit hub by connecting the Second Avenue Subway with the East 125th Street Lexington Avenue Subway and Metro North stations. Knowing a transit hub is coming, WE ACT is working to implement the East 125th Street Community Visioning Action Plan to catalyze the economic, cultural, and sustainability revitalization of East Harlem by leveraging new investments in the 125th Street Transit Corridor. The visioning plan creates more local economic opportunity using the cultural heritage and assets of the neighborhood as both a driver and enabler of economic development, a conduit to mitigate gentrification and advance greater climate resilience and environmental sustainability.

**Congestion Pricing**
LEVEL: State  
POLICY TYPE: Legislation  
STATUS: Implementation

PROBLEM: Manhattan is a traffic-heavy borough, where private vehicles, trucks, and buses fill up the streets and emit air pollution that harms health. In 2019, former Governor Cuomo signed a law that establishes congestion pricing below 60th street in Manhattan. Years later, congestion pricing still hasn’t begun.

SOLUTION: Congestion pricing has been a controversial policy, and enactment is moving slowly, but now Governor Hochul has voiced her support for congestion pricing. WE ACT has joined a
coalition led by Riders Alliance and is participating in the Environmental Justice Technical Advisory Group led by New York State. We are advocating for congestion pricing to begin and ensuring the burden of car traffic does not fall on Northern Manhattan and other environmental justice communities. We believe it is important to advise on how congestion pricing should roll out, to ensure that equity is central to the program.

Clean Heavy-Duty Trucks
LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Regulation, Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

PROBLEM: In addition to being one of the biggest emitters of climate change-causing greenhouse gas emissions, pollution from heavy-duty trucks contributes to poor air quality and public health harms. Heavy-duty trucks are the largest source of smog-causing nitrogen oxides — smog can cause asthma and other respiratory and cardiac problems, cancers, and premature deaths in adults and children, which disproportionately affects low-income and communities of color, particularly individuals that live near major roadways and truck-intensive facilities such as ports, warehouses, and distribution centers. There is a critical need for regulations to effectively address pollution from heavy-duty trucks, yet existing nitrogen oxides standards have not been updated for more than 20 years.

SOLUTION: WE ACT, in coalition with the Moving Forward Network, Climate Justice Alliance, and the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum, will be engaging the leadership and technical staff of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to advocate for more stringent standards for heavy-duty trucks and freight, and request the needed infrastructure to transition to transportation electrification. We will also participate in the rule-making process as the EPA seeks to update and finalize regulations to reduce greenhouse gas and nitrogen oxide emissions from heavy-duty trucks. These standards will promote the movement towards electric, zero-emission vehicles, which will protect the environment, save lives, and bring clean air to environmental justice communities all across the nation.
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