



2024

POLICY AGENDA

Campaigns and Initiatives

WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



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INTRODUCTION

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 access to healthy environments for communities of low-income and of color. Our work is guided by the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing of 1996.

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

- Addressing the cumulative impacts of exposure to pollution, toxic chemicals and other environmental harms
- Making sure local, state and federal climate, energy and environmental funding and policy interventions are applied equitably and reach those most impacted by the climate crisis
- Ensuring government accountability and public participation in decision-making processes
- Encouraging civic engagement and securing robust voter rights and protections
- Relieving utility debt and solidifying green and healthy housing as a human right
- Facilitating a just and equitable transition toward an energy future that provides direct benefits to impacted people.



SUMMARY

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
FUNDING A JUST AND EQUITABLE FUTURE			
Environmental Protection Fund	STATE	BUDGET	ONGOING
Equitable Implementation of the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act	FEDERAL	BUDGET & ADVOCACY	ONGOING
ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION			
Environmental Justice Programs Funding (Local Law 60 & 64)	CITY	BUDGET & ADVOCACY	IMPLEMENTATION
Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Implementation	STATE	ADVOCACY	ONGOING
Environmental Justice Law Implementation (S.2385/A.1564)	STATE	LEGISLATION	PAST DUE DATE
Enhanced Public Participation Plan (S.2385/A.1564)	STATE	LEGISLATION	TO BE REINTRODUCED
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)	FEDERAL	LEGISLATION & REGULATION	ONGOING

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & VOTING RIGHTS			
Get Out The Vote	CITY	PROGRAM	ONGOING
Voting Rights for Empowered Communities	STATE	LEGISLATION	TO BE REINTRODUCED
CLEAN AIR			
Cumulative Impacts Law (S.1317/A.1286)	STATE	LEGISLATION	ENACTED
Dismantling Injustice: A M.O.D.E.L. for Empowering Communities	FEDERAL	LEGISLATION	ONGOING
A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act	FEDERAL	LEGISLATION	ONGOING
Multi-Pollutant Standards	FEDERAL	REGULATION & ADVOCACY	ONGOING
ENERGY JUSTICE			
INFRASTRUCTURE			
New York Build Public Renewables Act (S.6453C/A.1466D)	STATE	LEGISLATION & BUDGET	ENACTED
Fighting Liquified Natural Gas and False Solution Infrastructure	FEDERAL	REGULATION & ADVOCACY	ONGOING
Equitable Clean Energy Siting and Transmission	FEDERAL	REGULATION, ADVOCACY, & LEGISLATION	ONGOING

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
TRANSITION			
National Grid (Downstate) Rate Case	STATE	REGULATION	ACTIVE CASE
New York Home Energy Affordable Transition (NY HEAT) Act (S.2016A/A.4592A)	STATE	LEGISLATION	IN COMMITTEE
Fighting For Environmental Justice In New York's Cap and Invest Program	STATE	REGULATION & ADVOCACY	ONGOING
AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY			
Energy Affordability Proceeding	STATE	REGULATION	ACTIVE PROCEEDING
New Efficiency New York (NENY) Proceeding	STATE	REGULATION & ADVOCACY	ACTIVE PROCEEDING
HEALTHY HOMES			
INDOOR AIR			
Indoor Air Quality Standards	CITY	LEGISLATION	IN COMMITTEE
HOUSING JUSTICE			
Good Cause Eviction (S.3082/A.5573)	STATE	LEGISLATION	TO BE REINTRODUCED

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
PUBLIC HOUSING			
NYCHA Healthy Communities Platform	CITY	ADVOCACY	ONGOING
MOVING OFF FOSSIL FUELS IN BUILDINGS			
Local Law 97	CITY	LEGISLATION	RULEMAKING
Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund	EXTREME HEAT COALITION	BUDGET	INTRODUCED
Achieving Healthy Indoor Air Environments	STATE & FEDERAL	REGULATION & ADVOCACY	ONGOING
EXTREME HEAT			
Indoor Maximum Temperature	CITY	LEGISLATION	NOT YET INTRODUCED
Extreme Heat Coalition	STATE	ADVOCACY	ONGOING
Expanding and Improving the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	STATE & FEDERAL	ADVOCACY & BUDGET	ONGOING
Heating and Cooling Relief Act (H.R. 6437)	FEDERAL	LEGISLATION	REINTRODUCED
OPEN & GREEN SPACE			
1% for Parks	CITY	BUDGET	ONGOING
Community Lead Resilient Infrastructure Projects	CITY & STATE	ADVOCACY & BUDGET	ONGOING

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
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SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

Community Land Act	CITY	LEGISLATION	IN COMMITTEE
East Harlem Comprehensive Plan	CITY & STATE	ADVOCACY & BUDGET	PROPOSAL

WASTE & SANITATION

Zero Waste Act	CITY	LEGISLATION & ADVOCACY	ENACTED
Community Composting	CITY	ADVOCACY	ONGOING
Waste Containerization	CITY	ADVOCACY	ONGOING

TOXICS

BEAUTY INSIDE OUT

Safe Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Act (S.3331B/A.143A)	STATE	LEGISLATION	ONGOING
Safer Beauty Bills Package	FEDERAL	LEGISLATION	INTRODUCED

PREVENTING CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York City	CITY	LEGISLATION & ADVOCACY	IN COMMITTEE
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POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
Lead Paint Right to Know Act (S.88/A.1687)	STATE	LEGISLATION	ONGOING
Lead and Copper Rule (LCRR)	FEDERAL	REGULATION	ONGOING

AFFORDABLE & EQUITABLE TRANSIT

Expand Fair Fares	CITY	BUDGET	ONGOING
Congestion Pricing	STATE	LEGISLATION	RULEMAKING

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

Manhattan Regional Clean Energy Hub	STATE	PROGRAM	ONGOING
Climate Education in New York State	STATE	LEGISLATION	TO BE INTRODUCED

Environmental Protection Fund

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: 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.

ACTION: Last year, the EPF was funded at \$400 million. WE ACT, along with more than 100 other organizations, is urging New York State Governor Kathy Hochul to fund and retain the EPF at \$400 million in 2024 to further 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 and ensure a fair share of these funds reach New York City frontline communities.

Equitable Implementation of the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act

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

CONTEXT: As the climate crisis worsens, the need for significant funding to protect and build healthy communities heightens. Communities on the frontline of the climate crisis deserve equitable investments.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue to work to ensure that funds from the IIJA and IRA reach communities that have been disproportionately burdened by the negative impacts of climate change and systemically left out of consideration for federal spending. We are committed to working with local, state, and federal officials, through our Justice40ward campaign and selection as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2 Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (TCTAC), to ensure that the implementation of the bills delivers critical funding to communities of color and areas of low-income and realizes the potential of these once-in-a-generation investments.



Environmental Justice Programs Funding (Local Law 60 & 64)

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Budget
STATUS: Implementation

CONTEXT: Local Laws 60 & 64 of 2018 mandate that NYC 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 NYC Mayor's commitment to environmental justice must be supported, as obstructions and a lack of funding will further exacerbate environmental injustices.

ACTION: WE ACT asks that the NYC Council provide annual funding of \$1 million to the Environmental Justice Program, starting in fiscal year 2025. 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).

Environmental Justice Law Implementation (S.2385/A.1564)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Past Due Date

CONTEXT: At the end of 2019, former NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the important Environmental Justice Law, which is part of the 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.

ACTION: The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation is now three years past the deadline of January 1st, 2020 to convene the Advisory Group. WE ACT will pursue the necessary convening of the Advisory Group and will advise in its direction.

Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Implementation

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: 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 focuses on disadvantaged communities (DACs) defined by the State's draft criteria.

ACTION: As a member of the New York State (NYS) Climate Justice Working Group, WE ACT will serve as a permanent advisor to the Climate Action Council; our counsel will keep false energy solutions out of the State's implementation of the CLCPA to ensure a just transition to a renewable energy future. There is a specific focus on Section 7(3) of the CLCPA, which makes clear that the State cannot make decisions that disproportionately burden disadvantaged communities when implementing the climate law. WE ACT is providing leadership on ensuring the State creates sufficient guidance for implementation of Section 7(3). We will also promote strategies to ensure DACs receive a minimum of 35-40 percent of the benefits from emission reduction programs, as stated in the CLCPA.



Enhanced Public Participation Plan (S.2510A/A.6584A)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: To Be Reintroduced

CONTEXT: In 2022, WE ACT led the historic passage of the strongest cumulative impacts law (S.1317/A.1286) in the country. However, it was missing a robust public participation section for evaluating the approval process of polluting facilities. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has existing guidance for incorporating environmental justice concerns into the polluting facilities permit review process. Yet, communities have not had an adequate voice on facilities wreaking havoc on water and air quality in their backyards. For example, in the South Bronx, the peaker plant is still running year-round and in Albany's South End, residents of the Ezra Prentice Homes have long been fighting the expansion of Global Companies' crude oil terminal just a few feet away from their public housing complex. These ongoing community fights with polluting facilities are evidence that we need to give communities of color the right to be meaningfully involved in the decision of whether a facility can operate in their neighborhoods.

ACTION: WE ACT and allies of the Cumulative Impacts working group will continue to advocate for the passing of the Enhanced Public Participation plan in the 2024 legislative session. The bill will require a facility applicant to submit an enhanced public participation plan for community engagement. The facility will have to hold at least three public information meetings early on to provide members of the community an opportunity to make statements, raise issues, and ask questions. The facility must then submit written proof to DEC how they have addressed the issues raised by the community.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Described as the "People's Environmental Law," the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is an essential tool in the fight against environmental racism and injustice, as well as climate injustice. When properly applied, it provides insight and engagement with the federal permitting processes through public participation, transparency, and equitable opportunities for intervention. However, it remains under attack, most recently in the name of quickly deploying "clean" energy projects that prioritize speed over communities, which limits thorough and fulsome environmental reviews, narrows the scope of federal requirements, and creates additional obstacles for community engagement and participation.

ACTION: WE ACT is a leading voice calling for a restored and strengthened NEPA. In recent years, WE ACT led the advocacy to secure nearly \$1 billion in implementation funds for nearly 10 agencies via the Inflation Reduction Act. WE ACT will continue our NEPA advocacy and work to bolster legislation such as the Environmental Justice for All Act, which is essential legislation to ensure that communities are centered, protected, and supported in the consideration of major federal projects. This work is multifaceted and ranges from submitting technical comment letters in various proposed regulations, leading and co-participating in briefings and informational sessions, advocating before Members of Congress to protect and defend the statute, and providing critical analysis through the lens of environmental justice, equity, and climate considerations.



Get Out the Vote

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Program
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Too often, people who are eligible to vote do not participate in this important democratic process. Voting rules imposed across the country have made it disproportionately more difficult for people of color to cast ballots compared to white voters, according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

ACTION: During citywide and statewide elections, WE ACT leads significant voter efforts in Northern Manhattan to encourage our communities to use their voices in our political system. Washington Heights is the only community in Northern Manhattan where voter registration falls well short of eligible voters, so we will work on getting voters registered there as well as getting voters throughout Northern Manhattan to turnout for both the primary and general elections.

Voting Rights for Empowered Communities

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: To Be Reintroduced

CONTEXT: The barriers to achieving a just and equitable society have their roots in democratic erosion rising in the U.S. We have seen the rising challenge to democracy from the January 6 Insurrection, sustained discrediting of traditional media sources, the introduction or passage of more than 400 voter suppression laws since the 2020 election, and an intentional weakening of bedrock human and civil rights policies and practices.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue to pursue passage of Federal legislation that expands voting provisions and reverses or stops voter disenfranchisement efforts that disempower people living in environmental justice communities.



Cumulative Impacts Analysis Requirements (S.8830/A.2103D)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Enacted

CONTEXT: The exposure to multiple environmental hazards simultaneously can compound adverse health impacts; WE ACT refers to this compounded harm as “cumulative impacts.” Communities of color and low-income often are exposed to multiple environmental hazards such as toxic chemicals, indoor air pollution, and outdoor air pollution due to multiple polluting facilities placed in their neighborhoods, leading to adverse health issues that span generations.

ACTION: With allies, WE ACT successfully encouraged NYS Governor Kathy Hochul to sign the Cumulative Impacts bill into law in 2022. The law requires the NYS DEC to deny new permit requests of polluting facilities if an existing burden report demonstrates the facility would be contributing to a disproportionate environmental burden on a DAC. This legislation will also deny the renewal of existing facilities’ permits if they fail to reduce their emissions in the community in which they are located. Now that the bill is law, WE ACT is monitoring the bill’s impending rulemaking process. The law is set to go into effect as of January 2025.

A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: 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. These injustices, paired with the cumulative, magnifying impacts of housing, economic, education, health care injustices mean that the health and well-being of millions of Americans have been ignored by our government for generations. That is why we need comprehensive environmental justice legislation.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue its integral role in the development of the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act, a crucial piece of legislation which will address long-standing environmental justice issues. We will work with our allied offices in both the House and Senate to continue advancing this essential bill in the 119th Congress, and continue building support from Members who currently are not sponsors.



Multi-Pollutant Standards

Level: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Regulation, Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The power and transportation sectors are major sources of air pollution in the U.S. Many of these regulations do not reflect the latest science or have not been updated in several years. Power plants and vehicles continue to spew out greenhouse gas emissions and toxic air pollutants that fuel climate change and disproportionately and adversely affect the health of low-income communities, Indigenous populations, and people of color. Starting in 2021, the U.S. EPA began the process of updating and developing rules to reduce criteria and toxic air pollutants such as fine particulates, nitrogen oxides, and benzene as well as climate pollutants like carbon and methane from the power plants, cars, and trucks.

ACTION: Last year, WE ACT launched a focused cohort of environmental justice organizations, called Clean Air for the Long Haul, to provide funding and technical assistance for overburdened communities to participate in the rulemaking process in the power and transportation sectors. This cohort will remain actively engaged in ongoing and upcoming rulemaking to ensure strong health standards. In addition, through the Climate Action Campaign's Solutions for Pollution Campaign, WE ACT is part of a diverse coalition of stakeholders urging the Biden administration and the EPA to finalize and promulgate a broader suite of aggressive and enforceable standards that target reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in a manner that does not continue to sacrifice environmental justice communities and set air pollutant criteria by the end of 2024.

Dismantling Injustice: A M.O.D.E.L. for Empowering Communities

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In the U.S., low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to live next to multiple sources of pollution that affect their health and well-being in ways that may not be identifiable when examining the effects of a single source of pollution. This is known as cumulative impacts, which, in turn, increase the risk of heart disease, asthma, cancer, reproductive harms, and premature mortality. The weakening of federal environmental protections, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, has resulted in significant uncertainty regarding the incorporation of cumulative impacts in federal legislative and regulatory actions. Consequently, it has become imperative to focus on local and state strategies that can address the placement of multiple-polluting sources in vulnerable communities and their detrimental effects on public health and climate change.

ACTION: WE ACT has partnered with the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law to produce a comprehensive suite of model cumulative impacts bills that can be readily adapted and adopted by advocates and legislators at the local and state levels. By implementing all or part of this legislative package, communities can take significant steps toward mitigating the health, economic, and well-being risks associated with cumulative exposure to pollution. We will continue to educate advocates and legislators that our Model for Optimizing and Designing Environmental Legislation (M.O.D.E.L.) bills empower decision-makers with an actionable solution and act to establish a solid foundation for the enactment of local and state cumulative impact legislation.



INFRASTRUCTURE

New York Build Public Renewables Act (S.6453C/A.1466D)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Regulatory

STATUS: Implementation

CONTEXT: The Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) is a NYS law won by WE ACT and allies in 2022. The law will use public funding to build publicly owned, 100-percent renewable energy, create a new era of green jobs, shut down polluting peaker plants by 2030, help significantly reduce energy bills for those who need it most, and make New York a national leader in the fight against climate change.

ACTION: WE ACT believes that energy systems should not be for-profit and should be controlled by publicly-owned entities and communities. Through participation in two major state-wide coalitions (the New York Energy Democracy Alliance and Public Power New York), WE ACT is involved in the implementation of the New York Build Public Renewables Act. Allies need to make sure renewable projects are built across the state with equity at the center, that peaker plants are shut down and being replaced with renewables, and that communities are getting the best deal possible on their energy bills. These are important steps in building out public power statewide and making sure that energy systems are clean, affordable, healthy, and resilient.

Fighting Liquified Natural Gas and False Solution Infrastructure

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In less than a decade since the U.S. Congress lifted restrictions on the export of liquified natural gas (LNG), we have become one of the world's largest exporters. There are more than 20 new and expanded proposed LNG terminals, many of them planned in communities already overburdened by the petrochemical industries.

Additionally, tax credit expansion, increases in hydrogen and direct air capture funding, and recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rulemakings have expanded the threat posed by build-outs of hydrogen and carbon capture technologies. These false solutions and LNG terminals and operations threaten to continue the danger fossil fuels pose to frontline communities and add further burdens to communities already overwhelmed by pollution.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue calling upon the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Federal Regulatory Commission (FERC), EPA, and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to use their authority to halt new and expanded LNG operations, directly address and mitigate climate change, safeguard environmental justice communities, and stabilize domestic energy prices. WE ACT will continue this advocacy campaign, which includes participation in regulatory comment periods, engagement with offices across the federal family, legislative strategies, Congressional outreach, digital ads, and earned media. In culmination, this work ensures that climate, economic, and environmental justice are considered in environmental reviews, permitting decisions, and public interest determinations, all while combating false solutions and the proliferation of fossil-fuel infrastructure.



Equitable Clean Energy Siting and Transmission

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Legislation; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Transmission lines are high voltage power lines used to transmit energy to populated areas through the electrical grid. With the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Infrastructure Investments and Job Act (IIJA), the U.S. is at a significant crossroad regarding opportunities for transmission planning, siting, and cost allocation. Transmission is an integral component of the clean energy transition and it must not continue or be built upon discriminatory practices rooted in racism and inequity.

ACTION: The moment is prime to embed foundational principles into the permitting process, including first, early, and ongoing community engagement; requiring environmental justice analysis in the initial analysis and throughout the permitting process; ensuring effective communication between regulating agencies, developers, and communities; and operationalizing legal and regulatory requirements to advance these goals. The work includes advocacy before the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the Office of Public Participation within FERC, and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), as well as Members of Congress and stakeholders.

TRANSITION

National Grid (Downstate) Rate Case

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Regulatory

STATUS: Active Case

CONTEXT: State regulators are responsible for ensuring that your monthly utility bills only cover the cost of delivering electricity or gas, and they set limits on how much utilities can profit. However, New York Public Service Law (PSL) prohibits including the costs of “legislative lobbying” at the state level as well as any membership dues paid to any entity that engages in legislative lobbying in rates. Because the PSL expressly only covers state legislative lobbying, regulatory and local lobbying expenditures could be slipping through the cracks.

We suspect that large investor-owned utilities, like National Grid, have been including their political costs in customer rates, alongside their investments in electrical poles and wires. This practice forces you to unknowingly contribute to the funding of dirty energy and impedes the clean energy transition.

ACTION: WE ACT is working with our partners at Earthjustice to intervene in the current National Grid (Downstate) rate case to hold utilities accountable and demand transparency in their cost recovery practices to ensure ratepayers aren't subsidizing their political lobbying.

New York Home Energy Affordable Transition Act (NY HEAT) (S.2016A/A.4592A)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: Low- and middle-income families are the most impacted by volatile gas heating prices and high energy bills, on average paying 9.3 percent of their income on utilities – three times more than other households. Gas customers in NYS are facing double-digit rate hikes to pay for expensive pipeline replacement programs that prolong the life of our gas system in direct contradiction with our state's climate goals. To make matters worse, in New York, the “100-foot Rule” requires utilities to connect new customers to a gas line for free based on how close their property is to an existing main gas line, typically within 100 feet. These “subsidies” give new homes free access to our gas system, but are actually paid for by increasing energy bills for everyday New Yorkers.

ACTION: The NY HEAT Act will reduce utility bills for New Yorkers by eliminating wasteful gas subsidies and capping energy bills at 6 percent of a household's income. A 6 percent cap on energy bills could save low- and middle-income families up to \$75 per month. The NY HEAT Act will also save families money by ending the 100-foot rule, which is costing New Yorkers more than \$200 million every year to unwittingly expand our gas system. Plus, NY HEAT could redirect up to \$150 billion of New Yorkers' money toward neighborhood-scale, clean electrification projects – money that would otherwise be spent on replacing old gas pipes with new gas pipes that will become obsolete well before they are paid off by ratepayers. In 2023, NY HEAT passed in the NYS Senate, but stalled in the Assembly. This year, NY HEAT is a top priority for WE ACT, with the backing of a broad coalition of environmental advocates across the state.

Fighting for Environmental Justice in New York's Cap and Invest Program

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: New York State's 2023 adopted budget included the framework for implementing the Climate Action Council's recommendation for a cap-and-invest program in the Final Scoping Plan, adopted in December of 2022. The program would set limits on how much greenhouse gas emissions companies would be allowed to emit, getting stricter over time, in line with the State's Climate Act. Companies would have to purchase allowances to pollute up to the emissions limit and pay penalties if they exceed it. The program design elements, including mechanisms for how the program will protect environmental justice and DACs, remain unclear.

ACTION: As the New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and the NYS DEC continue to develop the preliminary program rule, WE ACT will ensure there is focused attention on strict protections for environmental justice communities and that there is an equitable and robust plan to direct investments to DACs.

ACTION: The recent Build Public Renewables law created the REACH program. A program that allows for renewable energy projects to provide energy bill discounts to low- to middle-income customers in disadvantaged communities. The details of the program will likely be decided in the Energy Affordability Proceeding. WE ACT and allies will be engaged in the proceeding to get the most discounts possible for our communities. If you are struggling with utility bills, please [visit our site for self-enrollment into the state's energy affordability program](#).



New Efficiency: New York (NENY) Proceeding

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Active Proceeding

CONTEXT: Energy efficiency programs are currently not reaching low-income New Yorkers. New Efficiency: New York (NENY) is a \$5 billion proceeding within the Public Service Commission (PSC) that sets a goal and strategies for building developers, commercial and institutional building owners, industrial facilities, and residential households to pursue improvements that reduce energy consumption across the State. The July 2023 Order outlined a significant shift in the direction of the proceeding by directing utilities and NYSERDA to align their energy efficiency and building electrification (EE/BE) programs with the goals set in the 2019 Climate Act.

ACTION: NYSERDA has been directed to administer low-income programs with a focus on driving benefits to DACs but has historically not performed well in this area. WE ACT is intervening in the NENY proceeding with our partners in the Energy Efficiency for All and Better Buildings New York coalitions and the Energy Democracy Alliance to advance solutions that will direct a significant amount of money to ensure EE/BE programs go to DACs.

AFFORDABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Energy Affordability Proceeding

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Regulatory

STATUS: Active Proceeding

CONTEXT: 1.2 million low-income utility customers across New York State have over \$1.3 billion in utility debt as of August 2023. With high utility bills, people often forego their medications or healthy foods to pay their bills. These types of coping activities lead to hospitalizations, food insecurity, and developmental concerns in children. NYS allocated \$250 million in the 2022-23 budget to provide utility debt relief across low-income communities. However, the program funding is not adequate to address the enormous amount of debt people are facing.

INDOOR AIR

Indoor Air Quality Standards

Level: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: No law sets broad standards for indoor air quality in New York City, even though people spend 80-90 percent of their lives in indoor spaces. Fossil fuel appliances, tobacco smoke, outdoor air quality, mold, and pests all influence indoor air quality. Short-term exposure to poor indoor air quality can cause headaches, dizziness, or fatigue. Long-term exposure can cause respiratory diseases, heart disease, or cancer. These harms are not distributed equally across race, income, and gender.

ACTION: In September 2023, the New York City Council introduced bills that aim to set indoor air quality standards in public buildings – including schools. We will be advocating to ensure that any indoor air quality standards established prioritize buildings and facilities in environmental justice communities, which experience a greater burden of asthma and other respiratory conditions that are impacted by poor air quality. Establishing indoor air quality standards is a crucial step toward ensuring that we improve the conditions of our indoor environments and create healthier communities.

HOUSING JUSTICE

Good Cause Eviction (S.3082/A.5573)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: To Be Reintroduced

CONTEXT: New York City is dealing with a historic housing crisis, and nowhere is that felt more than in Northern Manhattan, where speculation is forcing rents to skyrocket and displacement of longtime community members feels imminent. As WE ACT continues to advocate for healthy housing policies that will remediate toxins, weatherize homes, and provide deep energy retrofits to apartments.

We want to ensure that tenants, particularly low-income tenants, are able to remain in their homes after receiving these necessary energy upgrades and are not priced out by landlords looking to increase rents due to new investments in their units.

ACTION: WE ACT supports the work of the statewide Housing Justice For All Coalition and their efforts to pass good cause eviction, a bill that gives every tenant in New York State the right to a renewal lease and protections against unreasonable rent increases. This legislation will give unregulated tenants across the state much needed stability and prevent unjust real estate speculation in low-income neighborhoods.

PUBLIC HOUSING

NYCHA Healthy Communities Platform

Level: City

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: 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, most of which are tied to the fact that it has been chronically underfunded for decades. As a result, the New Yorkers who rent apartments in NYCHA developments often have to endure environmental challenges such as mold, lead, and pests along with substandard service in terms of repairs and other basic issues.

ACTION: In 2024, the WE ACT NYCHA Working Group will engage with residents across Northern Manhattan on issues related to environmental health and environmental justice; specifically, the NYCHA Working Group will investigate resident safety and security, and NYCHA operations (e.g. lead, mold, sustainability, sanitation, and other important topics). The NYCHA Working Group is also organizing to insist that NYCHA properly engages residents and does meaningful outreach to residents about the RAD/PACT Program and Public Housing Preservation Trust.

MOVING OFF FOSSIL FUELS IN BUILDINGS

Local Law 97

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Rulemaking

CONTEXT: In NYC, buildings account for about 70 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, making that infrastructure the most significant contributor to the climate crises locally. To address this issue, in 2019, the NYC Council passed Local Law 97, 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.

ACTION: In September 2023, NYC's Department of Buildings (DOB) proposed a critical set of rules to govern Local Law 97's implementation and enforcement. WE ACT is working with other advocates to pressure the Adams administration to equitably implement Local Law 97 without weakening the law during the rulemaking process. WE ACT is advocating for DOB to:

- Set a minimum penalty amount that is sufficient to deter future noncompliance.
- Limit compliance exemptions to buildings and affordable housing residents who need it most.
- Limit renewable energy credits (RECs) to 10 percent of the pollution over a building's pollution limit.

Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Budget; Executive Plan

STATUS: Introduced

CONTEXT: Thanks to advocacy from WE ACT and allied organizations, NYS Governor Kathy Hochul in 2022 made a promise that the State would make 2 million of its homes electric or ready to be electrified, with 800,000 of these homes promised to be affordable housing. While this is an exciting promise, it is vital that Governor Hochul fund her declaration and implement programs that will reach low- to moderate-income households and buildings. In particular, homes that have environmental health hazards like lead, mold, and asbestos need help to resolve these problems before they do energy efficiency or electrification intervention.

ACTION: With allies in the Better Building New York and Renewable Heat Now coalitions, WE ACT is advocating for Governor Hochul to create a Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund that will direct funding to help households address deferred maintenance issues and eliminate legacy environmental hazards like lead, mold, old roofs, and poor ventilation. The GAP Fund would be administered by either the State's energy or housing agency and would provide tiered grant funding for low- to moderate-income homeowners, renters, building owners, and public housing authorities to address deferred maintenance and environmental health hazards indoors.

Achieving Healthy Indoor Air Environments

LEVEL: State; Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In 2022, WE ACT completed the Out of Gas, In with Justice pilot project, which examined the air quality impacts of replacing gas stoves with electric induction stoves in 20 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) apartments in the Bronx. The final report, released in 2023, breaks down the health benefits of electrification in affordable and public housing, the social acceptance of electric appliances, and the infrastructure needs of existing buildings for policy makers and advocates looking to advance equitable building decarbonization policies. These results have informed our understanding of the deep connection between decarbonization retrofits and healthy housing upgrades that are linked to decades old issues such as unremediated lead paint, asbestos, and mold as well as energy inefficiency problems and toxic emissions from appliances that burn fossil fuels.

ACTIONS: WE ACT will continue to leverage the data findings to advance healthy housing, energy efficiency, and clean air policies and practices at every level of government. This includes continuing to support the use of funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act funding to build healthy decarbonized communities in New York and across the nation.

Indoor Maximum Temperature

Level: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: No law sets broad standards for indoor air quality in New York City, even though people spend 80-90 percent of their lives in indoor spaces. Fossil fuel appliances, tobacco smoke, outdoor air quality, mold, and pests all influence indoor air quality. Short-term exposure to poor indoor air quality can cause headaches, dizziness, or fatigue. Long-term exposure can cause respiratory diseases, heart disease, or cancer. These harms are not distributed equally across race, income, and gender.

ACTION: In September 2023, the New York City Council introduced bills that aim to set indoor air quality standards in public buildings – including schools. We will be advocating to ensure that any indoor air quality standards established prioritize buildings and facilities in environmental justice communities, which experience a greater burden of asthma and other respiratory conditions that are impacted by poor air quality. Establishing indoor air quality standards is a crucial step toward ensuring that we improve the conditions of our indoor environments and create healthier communities.



Extreme Heat Coalition

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Extreme heat is deadly, and despite it being the number one weather-related killer in the U.S. (and disproportionately deadly for communities of color), there is little coordination between the government and community groups to implement solutions that will mitigate the negative health impacts. As extreme heat events increase in severity and frequency because of climate change, urban areas are at greater risk for deadly outcomes due to the high density of heat absorbing surfaces and limited green space, which contribute to the urban heat island effect.

ACTION: The Extreme Heat Coalition is working diligently to hold City and State agencies accountable to protecting marginalized and heat vulnerable residents from extreme heat intensified by urban heat islands. By convening allied organizations, we are building momentum to make proactive investments into life-saving green infrastructure, solar roofs, urban forestry, adaptation planning and programming, and advanced warning systems, the norm in New York climate policy. In 2023, the Coalition has allied with a multitude of environmental groups to get an Urban Forest Master Plan passed, ensuring interagency collaboration to grow and preserve the urban tree canopy to 30-percent land cover in New York City.



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

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

CONTEXT: Heat is the deadliest extreme weather event in the U.S. The summer of 2023 was the hottest on record, although it is safe to assume that record will be broken in the coming years. A recent [study](#) found that NYC has the worst urban heat island effect in the country, with temperatures that can measure up to 9°F hotter than surrounding rural areas for nearly 80 percent of the population, making New Yorkers particularly susceptible to the effects of rising temperatures. On average, extreme heat exposure in NYC has resulted in more than 350 heat-related deaths, and approximately 450 hospitalizations or emergency room visits per year.

ACTION: Cool homes with access to air conditioning are the best emergency defense against heat-related illness and death, yet low-income households and households of color 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 NYS leaders to improve the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), advocating for increased funding from the federal government to subsidize expensive summer utility bills for qualified households.

Heating and Cooling Relief Act (H.R. 6437)

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Re-Introduced

CONTEXT: National research on household energy burdens reports that low-income households spend three times more of their income on energy costs. In New York alone, utility debt was more than \$2.1 billion in March 2020. With mounting energy costs, many low-income and/or communities of color are forced to decide between paying the utility bill or purchasing food or other important medications. The Heating and Cooling Relief Act takes steps to reduce the energy burdens of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) recipients by investing more in weatherization and increasing funding to the program.

ACTION: This bill plans to address the energy burden by increasing the authorized annual spending for LIHEAP from \$3.8 million to \$40 billion. Additionally, the bill would provide emergency funds to families who are paying higher energy bills due to increased air-conditioning usage during extreme heat seasons. U.S. Senator Edward Markey and U.S. Representative Jamaal Bowman reintroduced the bill in the 118th Congress. WE ACT will continue working with Representative Bowman to engage more support for and educate key stakeholders on his comprehensive bill.



1% for Parks

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) has received inadequate funding over the last 40 years for maintenance and operations despite the critical role they play in the public life and resiliency efforts of New York City neighborhoods. While other major cities across the U.S. spend anywhere from 1.5 to 5 percent of their overall budget on parks, New York City spends just 0.6 percent, a woefully insufficient amount. NYC Parks is responsible for a 30,000 acre park system which includes our greenspaces, playgrounds, pools, beaches, waterfront, and athletic facilities. The department is also responsible for all trees planted in public spaces including our street trees, which account for 53 percent of the city's tree canopy. Trees, grass, and vegetation are all important environmental assets that help combat the urban heat island effect, which impacts dense cities like New York more, and Black and Latinx neighborhoods the most. Today, formerly redlined neighborhoods are an average of five degrees hotter in the summer than non-redlined areas due to less tree coverage and access to parks.

ACTION: WE ACT is a proud member of the Play Fair for Parks campaign, a coalition of 400-plus groups and organizations advocating for New York City's parks and open spaces. The Play Fair coalition is calling on the Mayor and the City Council to dedicate 1% of the City's budget to the NYC Parks Department that New Yorkers can finally secure the equitable, 21st-century parks system they deserve. WE ACT in particular wants to see additional funding for NYC Parks dedicated to the expansion and maintenance of greenspace, tree canopy, and waterfront access in formerly redlined neighborhoods in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx.

Community Lead Resilient Infrastructure Projects

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

CONTEXT: As frontline communities continue to endure an onslaught of more frequent and severe floods, heatwaves, and winter storms, it is increasingly evident relying on emergency protocols and clean up efforts alone are insufficient means to combat climate impacts. Especially here in New York, disadvantaged communities suffer extreme consequences of all of these climate impacts. Black New Yorkers are twice as likely to die from heat related illness compared to other racial groups, and nationally majority Black neighborhoods face the greatest flood risk. By October 2023, the U.S. had already experienced 24 climate disaster events that each cost upwards of \$1 billion. From last year, the average number of these catastrophic events since 2018 is five per year, and could increase if we do not drastically reduce our use of fossil fuels. To lower the toll on human lives and fiscal impacts, there must be proactive investments in resilient infrastructure that lessen damages to our neighborhoods.

ACTION: WE ACT will engage in City, State, and Federal proceedings that inform the flow of funding to projects that fortify urban forest and wetland ecosystems, scale up renewable energy projects, and expand permeable pavements, amongst other green infrastructure solutions. We will also advocate for robust and advanced community engagement so that residents have the opportunity to shape project goals and designs.



Community Land Act

Level: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: Land is a valuable and inelastic resource in New York City. For decades, landlords, private equity firms, and corporations have leveraged their market power to buy land in low-income neighborhoods - flipping properties to build new luxury developments, or enabling environmentally harmful activities that are out of line with community needs - which often exacerbates local housing, health, and environmental crises in the name of profits. On some occasions, valuable publicly owned land is sold by New York City to for-profit developers at steeply discounted prices, which can exacerbate gentrification.

ACTION: The Community Land Act is an urgently-needed set of bills that give community land trusts (CLTs) and other nonprofits tools to acquire and steward land in their communities that better serve neighborhood needs. This could include the development and preservation of permanently-affordable housing, community and commercial spaces, parks, greenspaces, and other critical needs. The bill package consists of two bills: the Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (Introduction 196) and Public Land for Public Good (Introduction 637). WE ACT will continue to work with the Community Land Act campaign organized and led by the NYC Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI) to pass these critical pieces of legislation.



East Harlem Comprehensive Plan

LEVEL: City; State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Budget

STATUS: Proposal

CONTEXT: A steadfast anchor for Latino/a/x social and economic life, East Harlem has been the birthplace of some of the country's most prominent cultural, political, and religious movements and icons. However, years of neglect, disinvestment, and short-sighted planning from the public and private sectors have stifled opportunity, undermined living standards, and allowed severe racial, economic, and environmental disparities to proliferate. This neighborhood has one of the highest heat vulnerability indexes in the city, averages two degrees warmer than city averages, and is one of Manhattan's most flood vulnerable neighborhoods. Now, East Harlem is on the verge of an unprecedented transformation due to the expansion of the Second Avenue Subway at 106th street, 116th street and 125th street. Without community-driven solutions, low-income communities of color in the neighborhood will continue to be hit the hardest by the harmful effects of gentrification.

ACTION: WE ACT is working with City and State agencies and legislators to create a comprehensive resiliency plan for East Harlem that will harness newly available federal and state funding to expand green infrastructure, fill existing gaps in waterfront revitalization plans, and implement WE ACT's East 125th Street Community Visioning Action Plan. These investments will catalyze the economic, cultural and sustainable revitalization of East Harlem by leveraging 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.

Zero Waste Act

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Legislation
STATUS: Enacted

CONTEXT: New York City recycles only 20 percent of its waste, even though 68 percent of waste in landfills is considered recyclable. Food found in municipal solid waste landfills (more than 35 million tons nationally) is a major contributor of methane as it decomposes. New York City throws out 4,000 tons of food waste per day. Throwing out excessive amounts of food waste like this poses several health challenges. Food waste attracts pests like rats, cockroaches, and pigeons, which plague neighborhoods that lack secure disposal options and carry diseases like Leptospirosis, which is easily transmittable to household pets and people and exacerbate existing respiratory illnesses like asthma.

ACTION: The Zero Waste Act will expand access to composting and recycling options for all households in Northern Manhattan and will set the city on course to achieve zero waste by 2030. Members of the Climate Justice Working Group developed an education outreach plan for Northern Manhattan to teach residents about the benefits and how-to's of composting in their homes. This policy will improve basic sanitation for Northern Manhattan neighborhoods and reduce the number of rats and mice seen on our streets.

Community Composting

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The passage of the Zero Waste Act has set in motion the next stage in how New York City handles and processes the food waste it will be required to collect. The City appears poised to create a waste infrastructure whose primary use for food waste is as a feedstock for the creation of biogas, specifically biomethane. Furthermore, The City will begin significantly cutting funding for community composting sites starting in 2025. This approach to composting will put our local network of community composters at risk. Without concerted action, New York City will lose this opportunity to establish composting as a fully funded solution for the processing of organic waste into healthy soil.

ACTION: WE ACT urges the City to formally designate composting as the primary and best solution for processing New York City's food waste. Composting is a circular practice that minimizes the lifecycle emissions of greenhouse gasses. Members of the Climate Justice Working Group will launch a campaign urging the City to embrace composting as a key and vital solution for the management of New York City's organic waste that reduces greenhouse gasses, restores our soil health, mitigates flooding, offers green jobs, and fosters community cohesion.



Waste Containerization

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Mounds of trash bags have become a staple of the street corner. Waste Containerization is important in solving two issues: rats and food waste. In August 2023 the NYC Department of Sanitation (DSNY) began a historic, \$5.7 million trash containerization pilot program in Manhattan's Community Board 9 (MN09), which will overhaul and modernize waste collection at up to 10 residential blocks and 14 schools in West Harlem this fall. This pilot program is the first step to bringing New York City up to par with peer cities across the world, who have effectively implemented containerized waste management systems over previous decades.

ACTION: WE ACT is in strong support of this pilot program as a part of a multi-faceted approach to rat mitigation in Northern Manhattan. We also support waste containerization for the positive public health impacts and quality of life improvements to the community. WE ACT looks forward to making waste containerization the norm throughout the city and plans to advocate for DSNY to develop a strong, community-driven implementation process as they expand the program citywide – including container design.

BEAUTY INSIDE OUT

Safe Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Act (S.4265/A.6969)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: There are many toxic chemicals in personal care products (e.g. soaps, cosmetics, hair straighteners, etc.), 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. Due to the societal elevation of white beauty standards and aggressive target marketing, young women and femme-identifying people of color have higher rates of use for these harmful products.

ACTION: As co-chair of the Just Green 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 ban the most dangerous toxic chemicals to women/femme-identifying people of color's health from a majority of personal care products.

Safer Beauty Bills Package

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Introduced

CONTEXT: 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 in general.

ACTION: 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 reintroduced in Congress, which include Toxic Free Beauty Act H.R. 3619 and Cosmetic Fragrance and Flavor Ingredient Right to Know Act, H.R. 3621.



PREVENTING CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York City

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Legislation

STATUS: In Committee; Ongoing

CONTEXT: 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 found that 11,972 children diagnosed with lead exposure (5 mcg/dL or greater) were living in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) apartments that should have been lead-free a long time ago. The report also identified a severe lack of enforcement for Local Law 1 of 2004, which was designed to eradicate childhood lead poisoning by 2010.

ACTION: WE ACT is a leading member of the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP), and we anchor a roundtable of leading 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 22 bills passed to improve lead poisoning prevention policies in New York City. In 2024, NYCCELP will focus on the enforcement of these laws, tenant and worker protections, removing lead service lines, and increasing public awareness through education and outreach.

Lead Paint Right to Know Act (S.88/A.1687)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: New York has more children with elevated blood lead levels than any other state in the U.S. 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.

ACTION: It is important to have statewide action to prevent childhood lead poisoning. As a co-leader of the Lead Free Kids New York coalition, WE ACT is addressing the issue through coalition building, policy development, and messaging. The coalition is focusing on creating a statewide law called the Lead Paint Right to Know Act (S.88/A.1687), which ensures that testing homes for lead during the buying and selling stage happens and closes the loophole that allows property owners to avoid knowing their homes' lead status. Additionally, the coalition is focused on ensuring that NYS Governor Kathy Hochul's new lead program, which she announced in the State's 2023 budget, is implemented successfully within the zip codes with the highest rates of childhood lead poisoning.

Lead and Copper Rule (LCRR)

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In the Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment (2021), the EPA further estimated that roughly 9.2 million lead service lines still exist and remain in place. Many of the existing lines are located in low-income and/or communities of color where households are disproportionately exposed to lead in their public drinking water.

ACTION: WE ACT continues to advocate for safe drinking water and equitable evaluation and replacement of the full lead service line. The Lead and Copper Rule improvements function not just as a regulation, but also serves as a tool for water utilities to assess and determine the quality of resident's drinking water. Through written public comments and input sessions, WE ACT advocates for more stringent, health-based lead action levels that are as close to zero as is feasible and to require utilities to proactively replace all lead service lines without requiring residents to pay for costs on their property.



Expand Fair Fares

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Public transportation is the lifeblood of New York City. Millions of residents rely on subways and buses on a daily basis to get them where they need to be. Unfortunately, recent fare hikes by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) put further strain on low-income New Yorkers, who already struggle to afford public transit and must sacrifice other basic needs to afford a MetroCard.

ACTION: In 2019, New York City created “Fair Fares,” a program to provide half-priced MetroCards to New Yorkers living below the national poverty line. While this was an incredible win, the income limitations leave many more New Yorkers in need ineligible for the program. WE ACT continues to push the City Council and Mayor Adams to expand eligibility for “Fair Fares” to New Yorkers earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. WE ACT was also excited to support the newly implemented MTA free bus pilot, now happening in one bus route per borough.

Congestion Pricing

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Rulemaking

CONTEXT: 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 NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a law that establishes congestion pricing below 60th street in Manhattan. The intention of the legislation is to reduce traffic and raise revenue for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) via a tolling program. Years later, congestion pricing still hasn't begun.

ACTION: Implementing congestion pricing has been a slow process, particularly because it is important to understand potential traffic and air quality implications in environmental justice communities, and establish the steps for preventing any negative impacts. This year, the tolling program received federal approval of its environmental review. Now, the Traffic Mobility Review Board must put forth the final tolling scenario. It is vital that WE ACT and partner organizations uplift the public transport benefits that will result from a tolling program, and help ensure that the tolling scenario does not lead to negative impacts for environmental justice communities. WE ACT is participating in a Environmental Justice Technical Advisory Group led by the MTA.



Manhattan Regional Clean Energy Hub

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Program

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Communities of color and low-income receive the least amount of clean energy investments in their neighborhoods, buildings, and homes. There are many reasons for this, including the complex process of qualifying, applying, and receiving funding for home energy improvements. We also know it is these same communities that are not represented in the growing clean energy workforce. As New York works to reach its goal of getting fossil fuels out of buildings, it is vital that we ensure low-income communities and communities of color - who contribute the fewest emissions that fuel climate change while being disproportionately burdened by the impacts of this crisis - are not left behind. Without policies and programs that are focused on these communities, we are in danger of that happening. WE ACT believes that we must take a grassroots approach to bringing clean energy opportunities to homes and businesses.

ACTION: New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) co-created the Regional Clean Energy Hubs program with advocates to bring services to communities across New York. With partners at Green City Force, Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development, Kinetic Communities Consulting, USL Technologies, and Pratt Institute, WE ACT launched the Manhattan Regional Clean Energy Hub during NYC Climate Week NYC 2023. In this Hub, we are conducting outreach and then providing clean energy services for low- to middle-income renters, building owners, and small businesses. We are also conducting outreach to residents in environmental justice areas for training and employment in the clean energy workforce.



Climate Education in New York State (S.6837/A.9831 & S.6877/A.11143)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: To Be Introduced

CONTEXT: 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 to deal with the challenges of a shifting climate and develop solutions to address this crisis.

ACTION: WE ACT will work with other stakeholders in education to pursue legislation that supports climate education initiatives that are centered in justice. This new state legislation will guide development of climate change education in schools and will require the adoption of climate science in high schools by increasing funding through grants.

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WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

1854 Amsterdam Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10031 // 212-961-1000

50 F Street, NW, Suite 550, Washington, DC 20001 // 202-800-5896

Web: weact.org // Facebook: [weactforej](https://www.facebook.com/weactforej) // Twitter: [weact4ej](https://twitter.com/weact4ej) // Instagram: [weact4ej](https://www.instagram.com/weact4ej)