



**TESTIMONY
OF THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
BEFORE THE
JOINT HEARING OF THE SENATE FINANCE AND ASSEMBLY WAYS & MEANS
COMMITTEES REGARDING THE
FISCAL YEAR 2016-2017 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY BUDGET PROPOSALS
January 28, 2016
Albany, N.Y.**

Greetings. My name is Russ Haven and I am Legislative Counsel for the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). NYPIRG is a non-partisan, not-for-profit research and advocacy organization. Consumer protection, environmental preservation, public health, health care quality, higher education, and governmental reforms are our principal areas of concern. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on the governor's executive budget proposals for the environment and energy.

As you evaluate the budget for environment and energy consider the following: Scientists have declared 2015 as the hottest year on record. *Ever*. It surpassed 2014, the previous hottest year on record. New Yorkers who have suffered through extreme weather events like Sandy, Irene and Lee need no reminder that incredible heat spells, snow falls, rain, surging tides and floods are the new normal. Climate change is not just an environmental issue: A warming climate is affecting New York's agricultural and tourism sectors; deteriorating air quality results in more emergency room visits, illnesses and deaths; extreme heat causes an increasing number of deaths; and heat and frequent severe weather significantly increases the demands placed on the state's infrastructure, particularly our rickety electric grid.

Fortunately for New York, for years the Legislature and governor have led the way by creating a foundation for the state to transition from fossil fuels to a system reliant on efficiency and renewable energy. NYPIRG believes the environmental budget's focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping adapt to our changing climate is entirely appropriate.

NYPIRG urges the Legislature to consider the governor's proposals with respect to climate a floor, not a ceiling, on the commitment necessary to aggressively move the state away from fossil fuels and to the renewable energy economy.

In particular we emphasize the following environment and energy budget proposals:

CLIMATE

We endorse the proposal to create a new Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation category within the Environmental Protection Fund to provide \$32.5 million in support of greenhouse gas reduction projects not currently addressed through other programs and address resiliency and adaptation planning and implementation.

NYPIRG supports boosting the minimum solar installation goals for the state and converting SUNY facilities to renewable energy by 2020.

NYPIRG supports eliminating coal-fired power plants by 2020. We urge, however, that the state not subsidize the state's nuclear power plants and that we move to close those plants as well.

The governor importantly emphasizes energy efficiency by proposing energy retrofits for 100,000 multi-family housing units by 2025. The legislature should support this initiative and press to accelerate the timetable.

NYPIRG supports the proposal to undertake a Large Scale Renewable Energy Master Plan, a potentially useful tool in utility-scale renewable energy facility development. However, we urge that the state commit and move expeditiously to develop offshore wind and other promising renewable energy projects to make significant strides in displacing inefficient and polluting fossil fuel sources. Simply put, the state cannot meet its renewable energy goals without offshore wind.

NYPIRG supports making the state's 50% renewable energy by 2030 goal enforceable. However, we vigorously oppose subsidizing energy sources that are not truly renewable—such as nuclear energy and solid waste incineration.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND

NYPIRG applauds the governor's proposal to fund the Environmental Protection Fund ("EPF") at \$300 million. NYPIRG supports the state's funding through the Environmental Protection Fund for the first time of \$1 million for Children's Environmental Health Centers of Excellence. These Centers detect and treat children's illnesses of environmental origin, with a focus on prevention. NYPIRG also supports the governor's proposal for funding \$2 million in grants to environmental justice communities to address public health and environmental programs in traditionally impacted areas.

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

NYPIRG supports the governor's proposal to make a substantial down payment of \$125 million in FY 2016-17 and a commitment to an additional \$125 million for FY 2017-18 for funding drinking water, sewer lines and wastewater treatment facility repairs and upgrades. New York's aging infrastructure is in desperate need and the costs of repair and replacement only increase after system failures.

DIESEL EMISSIONS

Diesel emissions are a significant public health problem. Under the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (“DERA”) New York’s 2010 original deadline for retrofits of agency fleets and state contactors to reduce large vehicle diesel emissions has been extended over several budgets. NYPIRG urges that the state fleet be fully compliant and that it press its contractors to meet the diesel emissions standards to remove pollutants from the air and protect public health.

CHILD SAFE PRODUCTS ACT

In the budget briefing book the governor pledges his support for legislation authorizing the state to regulate and phase out toxic chemicals in children’s products. Toxic chemicals are associated with learning disabilities, cognitive impairment and developmental issues; cancer incidence; reproductive health damage; and a variety of other negative health consequences. Children are particularly vulnerable to toxic chemical exposures, including hormone-mimicking substances. The Environmental Protection Fund Environmental Health budget line includes \$1 million dollars, which could be used to fund child safe products legislation. We urge the Legislature to work with the governor to protect all of New York’s children from toxic chemicals in products designed, manufactured and marketed for children.

TOXIC WASTE CLEAN UP FUNDING

NYPIRG appreciates that the governor’s proposed budget follows through on the 2015 commitment to fully fund toxic waste cleans through the state’s Superfund (\$100 million) and Brownfields programs. The state should move quickly to remediate toxic waste sites from communities across the state to protect health and the environment.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views on the energy and environment budget.

