

February 1, 2024

Re: Environmental Conservation Budget Hearings

Dear Senator Liz Krueger, Assembly Member Helene Weinstein and members of the New York State Legislature:

As a New York resident, I am concerned about the impact of climate change on our state, our country, and our planet. This past year has seen record heat levels and rising numbers of extreme climate events that affect us here in New York and affect so many people throughout the world. In my neighborhood in Brooklyn, we have seen recent flooding that has impacted our homes, our mass transit system and our waterways. I am proud that New York State is taking a proactive approach to addressing climate change and encourage the legislature to move ahead with the several pieces of important climate legislation now before you.

One of these pieces of legislation is the NY HEAT (Home Energy Affordable Transition) Act (S201B/A4592B) which needs to be included in the budget so that it is fully funded.

This bill is important because it will align utility regulation with the goal of transitioning from gas to renewable energy in accordance with Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. It will repeal the subsidies that we pay to support the expansion of gas infrastructure and thereby move the Public Service Commission to build infrastructure that will support the transition to renewable energy that is so crucial to addressing climate change.

In addition, the HEAT Act would protect low income New Yorkers from paying more than they can afford for their utilities. It would do this by capping their rates at 6% of their income so that they are not financially squeezed as the state moves to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

The Governor, in her State of the State address, recognized the importance of this bill, but did not fully fund the affordability protections, which need to be put into the budget. Currently, about 1.3 million New York households pay more than 6% of their income on utility bills; these are mostly low-income households. These households are paying an average of 15% of their income on energy bills, often forcing impossible choices between paying for heat and paying for other necessities. This needs to change.

The burning of fossil fuels for heating, hot water, and cooking account for approximately one-third of greenhouse gas emissions in New York State. Fossil fuels like natural gas used in our homes impact indoor air quality, contributing to the incidence of asthma and heart disease. The HEAT ACT would help to remedy this public health concern.

In addition to the NY HEAT Act, I would also encourage you to support the Climate Superfund Act (S 2129A/A 3351S), which would hold the most egregious emitters of greenhouse gases financially responsible for their contribution to climate pollution, thus helping the state afford the measures that must be taken to build climate resiliency in New York.

Finally, I would ask that you support the inclusion of a necessary \$1B in the budget for spending on climate resilience and adaptation. As we have already begun to witness, every year of inaction on resilience and adaptation costs more in lives and property down the road. In the past year, climate experts have noted that climate change impacts have been progressing faster than anticipated. We know that it is crucial to act sooner rather than later if we are to prevent the worst from happening. I hope you will provide the support that will make these legislative initiatives part of New York's arsenal in our fight for climate justice.

Sincerely,  
Becky Plattus  
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