



Open New York Testimony for the 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Environmental Conservation and Energy

January 28, 2026

Thank you, Chair Krueger and Chair Pretlow, for the opportunity to share testimony in response to the Executive Budget. My name is Annemarie Gray and I serve as the Executive Director of Open New York. Open New York is an independent, grassroots, pro-housing nonprofit with hundreds of volunteer members across the state.

As the Legislature reconvenes and enters budget negotiations, New Yorkers are facing many significant challenges, including a lack of affordable housing, increasing utility bills, aging infrastructure, and a worsening climate crisis. New York State can and must be a leader in delivering real results that improve New Yorkers' lives, while also protecting our environment and addressing the generational challenge of climate change.

To that end, Open New York is encouraged by Governor Hochul's proposed modernization of the State's Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) in her FY27 Executive Budget. SEQRA was written over 50 years ago for a vastly different era. A lot can change in 50 years, and since SEQRA was enacted, it has not been fully updated to recognize two of the biggest threats our state faces today: climate change and housing affordability. As a result, housing projects across the state have been delayed, blocked, or abandoned. SEQRA allows just one local opponent to stop or slow the creation of new homes we need—projects with local community and government support—causing housing costs to skyrocket and families to get priced out. Without reforms, SEQRA will ironically continue to incentivize projects that create sprawl and increase our climate emissions.

The impacts of blocked projects, frivolous lawsuits, and unnecessary delays are affecting communities across our state, but I want to take a moment to highlight a project that is just one example of why we must modernize SEQRA. In Buffalo, a proposal approved by the City Council to replace a parking lot with 200 homes, including affordable units for seniors, as well as a daycare center and a new public park, was stalled for 2 years by a SEQRA lawsuit claiming that the project did not serve the public good, despite the community's desperate need for affordable housing and childcare.

This Legislature is ready to take on this challenge. Similar reforms have already been proposed by Senator Rachel May and Assembly Member Anna Kelles as sponsors of the "Sustainable Affordable Housing and Sprawl Prevention Act" (S3492/A6283), which passed through the Senate last year. We applaud them for the work they've already done to address SEQRA's shortcomings and want to highlight two pieces of S3492/A6283 that the Senate and Assembly should consider for their one-house budgets: First, the higher number of units that are allowed in qualifying housing projects for Type II exemptions. Second, the removal of outdated and extraneous analyses from the environmental review process that larger housing projects must conduct.

Modernizing SEQRA has widespread support throughout New York. Housing advocates, environmental advocates, transit advocates, and business leaders from every corner of the state have come together to launch the Unlock NY's Future campaign in support of these changes. These advocates agree that allowing projects which reflect community priorities to move forward benefits all New Yorkers. Local elected leaders are tired of watching desperately needed projects halted because of one lawsuit. Most notably, New York City Mayor Mamdani has stressed the importance of SEQRA reform in order to build 200,000 new affordable homes in New York City.

We encourage the Legislature to support the Governor's reforms to SEQRA. Modernizing SEQRA will end unnecessary delays, endless lawsuits, and huge cost increases that are passed directly onto New Yorkers while advancing our much needed housing, child-care and environmental projects.