



Testimony of Avni Pravin-Buck, Deputy Director of Alliance for a Green Economy
before the New York State Senate Housing Budget Hearings

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I. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our testimony and perspective on the major housing priorities that require funding in New York State for the 2027 FY Budget. Alliance for a Green Economy (AGREE) is a New York State nonprofit that has been working for over a decade towards a 100% renewable, clean, safe, democratic, and affordable energy system. We are highly focused on effective and just program design for policies and funds that help the more vulnerable community members of our state transition to clean energy and healthier homes.

We also ground truth program and policy designs by assisting residents in our local community in Central New York in accessing energy efficiency programs, heat pumps, and solar. We were one of the original HeatSmart Campaigns, a collaboration of organizations across New York with the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), with the aim of educating residents and building owners on making energy-saving improvements to their homes and switching from burning fossil fuels for heat to using heat pumps. We continue this work as one of NYSEERDA's regional clean energy hubs, a one stop shop for Central New York residents to learn about their options for making home improvements to lower their bills. We intervene in most major utility rate cases in New York, where the rubber meets the road on what utilities spend our money on. We also participate in many of the major policy proceedings before the New York Public Service Commission and work to inform NYSEERDA on how its programs could reach more people and be more equitable.

In my testimony, I'll discuss why it's absolutely crucial for the state to adequately fund the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund program to put households on a path towards lower energy bills, better thermal comfort in the home, and more energy efficient homes.

This essential program was established in the budget in April 2025 with \$2 million in initial seed funding for the Division of Housing and Community Renewal. We request the program now be fully funded with \$200 million in this year's state budget. The program addresses pre-efficiency and pre-electrification repairs that present major barriers for many households to be able to enroll in the EmPower+, Weatherization Assistance Program, and Clean Heat Programs. When adequately funded, the GAP Fund will ensure that every New Yorker has the opportunity to participate in cost-saving energy efficiency and electrification programs to improve their homes.

II. The Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund will help people survive worsening heat waves and deep freezes

Thermal comfort in homes is not just important for quality of life - it can also be the difference between life and death. Heat waves in New York summers are continuing to worsen in duration, frequency, and severity, and public health research indicates that the impacts of these heat waves fall disproportionately on low-income communities of color. This is because low income households are often unable to properly cool their homes due to issues with weatherization and air leaks, cracks, or holes in the building. The same problem impacts how people experience New York winters when deep freezes occur; homes that are not properly insulated and experience a lot of heat loss are unable to heat their home adequately, and often receive massive energy bills in trying to do so. With nearly 13% of New Yorkers in debt to their utility and more than 400,000 households at risk of termination, many homeowners are forced to choose to heat or eat.

While many of these households are eligible for state assistance programs, such as the Weatherization Assistance Program or EmPower+, they can be deferred or rejected from the programs if there are problems in the home that are not covered by weatherization funds. And there is a litany of issues that households can experience that result in deferral - everything from the presence of toxic hazards like mold, lead, and asbestos, to outdated electrical panels and wiring, to roof, foundation, and attic issues can lead to a weatherization project grinding to a halt. Nationwide, approximately 1 in 5 households are deferred from the Weatherization Assistance Program due to needed health and safety repairs.

III. The GAP Fund will expand access to the state's existing funds for residential clean energy programs

EmPower+, the Weatherization Assistance Program, and several other electrification programs have shown great success in program interventions. For example, participation in EmPower+ has been growing by an average of 27% per year, resulting in over 30,000 upgraded homes in 2024. In order to sustain this level of growth, we need to ensure that households are weatherization-ready and able to enroll in EmPower+. Weatherization-readiness upgrades can be expensive, and even simple repairs like an upgraded electric panel, which can be anywhere from \$1,000 to \$4,000, can be cost prohibitive for an individual household. And yet, if covered by the GAP Fund, this small investment from the state would allow a household to move forward in receiving further efficiency and electrification investments. This means that investments by the state in a household as low as \$1,000 could unlock \$10,000 in program benefits by remediating the weatherization barrier. While cost data is sparse, and barrier remediation expense varies widely across the state, National Grid's downstate utilities have begun collecting

data from their Weatherization Health and Safety Pilot, and have presented some initial data showing what it costs to get 85 homes weatherization ready.¹

Prescriptive Measures	Total Pipeline					
	Measure count	Avg Cost per Measure	Estimated Total Cost	Under \$10k Count	Over \$10k Count	Estimated enabled savings (MMBtu)
Carbon monoxide hazards	5	\$2,800	\$14,000	5	0	28.38
Gas Leaks and Pipe Repair	3	\$2,238	\$6,713	3	0	10.3
Ventilation Remediation (Installation of exhaust fans)	13	\$4,075	\$52,975	13	0	0
Replacement or installation of new ventilation systems	2	\$700	\$1,400	2	0	112.22
Combustion Appliance Ventilation				0	0	0
Roof repair/replacement	45	\$19,889	\$895,000	22	23	679.17
Domestic Water Systems	7	\$5,975	\$41,825	7	0	0
Custom Measures						
Suspected electrical issues	18	\$1,944	\$34,990	18	0	0
Suspected environmental hazards	47	\$8,550	\$90,300	47	0	453.83
<i>Asbestos</i>	6		\$0	6		0
<i>Vermiculate</i>	4		\$0	4		0
<i>Mold and/or mildew like substance</i>	4		\$0	4		0
<i>Water mitigation</i>	15	\$2,600	\$39,000	15		332.76
<i>Pest removal</i>	4	\$3,200	\$12,800	4		121.07
<i>Junk removal & Carpentry</i>	14	\$2,750	\$38,500	14		0
Total	140		\$1,137,203	117	23	1,283.90

IV. Initial pilot projects show success in completing pre-electrification projects to overcoming weatherization barriers in people’s homes.

A. The National Grid Weatherization Health and Safety Pilot

This \$1.1 million shareholder funded program was established in 2024 to address common health and safety issues existing in their customers’ homes at no cost to the customer. 85 program applicants will gain access to EmPower+ as a result of the interventions. Initial data on the cost of repairs shows that 83% of the interventions will be cheaper than \$10,000, and the program stands to enable an estimated savings of 1,283.90 MMBtu.

B. The EnergyFit Pilot program in New York City

Conducted by the Pratt Center for Community Development, EnergyFit helped 75 households access clean energy and energy efficiency programs. Their findings show the breakdown of pre-electrification and pre-weatherization barriers in participating households.

¹ See Case 23-G-0225, Proceeding on Motion of the Commission as to the Rates, Charges, Rules and Regulations of The Brooklyn Union Gas Company d/b/a National Grid NY for Gas Service. Weatherization Health and Safety (WH&S) Annual Report, filed June 2025. Available at: <https://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/Common/ViewDoc.aspx?DocRefId={008BC297-0000-CC17-A6BE-9069C7CFE3A5}&DocTitle=Annual%20Report%20Weatherization%20Health%20and%20Safety%20June%202025>

Percent of EnergyFit homes with health & safety issue	Mold	Asbestos	Ventilation	Roof	Windows	Boiler
	25%	10%	10%	22%	5%	5%
	Ceiling/Walls	Gas	Electrical	Lead	Other	
	8%	17%	6%	16%	15%	

- V. Include the GAP Fund Legislation S3315A / A.2101 (Gonzalez/Kelles) in the budget and increase funding to \$200 million to ensure the program has enough money to get started and can serve at least 10,000 households.**

Thank you for considering our recommendations to expand and advance this critical program. We look forward to a continued partnership to bring about cleaner, healthier homes that are more affordable to heat and cool for the future of New Yorkers. Please feel free to reach out with questions or concerns about our testimony.