

Keith Kinch Testimony – NY State Senate Hearing

Thank you for allowing me to submit this statement in support of Senator Liz Krueger and New York State's bold plans to combat the effects of climate change.

With billions of federal dollars on the table for IRA-related tax and financial incentives, workforce development programs and clean energy-related initiatives, New York State has an opportunity to take a leadership role in demonstrating how these funds can better the lives of American citizens and combat climate change.

The devastating weather that has impacted New York State – from last month's blizzard in Buffalo to the deadly flooding of New York City from Hurricane Sandy and Ida – continues to be made more likely by human activity, neglect, negligence and ambivalence towards our planet and its climate. The frequency of these extreme weather events is increasing, and so is their cost – both in the billions of dollars spent for infrastructure repairs and insurance claims, to increased hospitalizations and loss of life. And things will continue to get worse before they get better particularly for low-income, often Black and Brown communities so often on the front lines of this crisis.

And that's why I'm grateful to be discussing this important topic – envisioning how to create a more livable future for all residents of the great State of New York.

For those who are not familiar with BlocPower, we are a Brooklyn-based climate tech company focused on making buildings smarter, greener and healthier—improving the environment and helping Americans live better lives by replacing aging, inefficient, and sometimes toxic fossil fuel-burning heating and cooling systems and appliances with clean, efficient, all-electric ones. By doing so, not only are we helping to reduce the up to 40% of total greenhouse gas emissions emanating from buildings, but also lowering energy bills for residents, creating good green jobs, decreasing our nation's reliance on fossil fuels and reducing the instances and cost of environmentally-related health issues caused by these aging buildings.

In Ithaca, BlocPower is helping the city achieve its climate change goals by retrofitting its entire building stock of 6,000 buildings with heat pumps and solar, while improving their energy efficiency and resistance to inclement weather through comprehensive weatherization and remediation services. Our goal by 2030 is to eliminate up to 400,000 tons of CO₂ that the city generates each year. And if we can do that in Ithaca – New York's 70th-largest city – imagine what we can do in Cheektowaga, New Rochelle, Huntington, Syracuse, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn where I grew up, or even Albany. We're doing it in Oakland, San Mateo, San Jose, Denver and dozens of cities around the country. Why not do more right here in the Empire State? With funds from the IRA, New York can build a new empire – a green economy empire – and lead this nation the way New York leads it in business, finance, tourism, cuisine, entertainment, media, fashion and so many other industries.

We can do this. We have the technology. We have the infrastructure. We have the political will and support from the people. We have the desire to improve the planet we live upon for the sake of our children and our children's children. And now, with the IRA, we have more funding than ever to make it happen.

The one thing that we don't have right now is a skilled green economy workforce. We have the people-power – more than 19.3 million residents – and with State unemployment at 5.8% we have plenty of people who need living wage jobs in a growing sector. But without skilled workers, New York will fall behind other states in building that green economy empire. Without people who know how to install heat pumps, weatherize buildings, upgrade electrical panels, conduct energy audits, repair EV charging stations and apply other clean energy technologies, New York will have difficulties in achieving its climate change goals, and its residents will miss out on the tremendous opportunities that the green economy has in store.

So what's holding New York back? Several obstacles – the largest of which is a major national shortfall in skilled construction workers. As veteran plumbers, electricians, carpenters and other workers retire, few are stepping up to replace them, both because they are unaware of the opportunities that await them, and because there's not nearly enough pathways to skills training. We can overcome these obstacles, but to do so will require massive, state-wide investment in workforce development programs designed to provide training, jobs and hope – especially to low to moderate income communities and disenfranchised people who are struggling and sometimes failing to thrive, even in one of the wealthiest of the 50 states.

In September of 2021, the City of New York tasked BlocPower with creating a green economy workforce in its neighborhoods most impacted by gun violence. With a \$37 million grant – money that originated from federal stimulus programs similar to the IRA – we launched our Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) and began providing paid-training to New York City residents most in need of a green career pathway.. Through partnerships with local community and civic groups, the word spread about the CCC and thousands upon thousands of people applied for the opportunity to learn new skills and the hope for a better financial future.

The original mandate was to train 1,200 members but in its first year, the CCC trained more than 1,700 members – of whom 81% were previously under- or unemployed. More than half of all participants were between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. Nearly all of those trained – 97% – were Black and Brown, and a quarter were women – demographic groups that are woefully underrepresented in building, construction and green careers.

Graduates are OSHA certified and ready to step on a construction site. So far, we've helped more than 400 of our members secure permanent jobs. And the communities in which we worked saw incidents of gun violence fall.

The program was such a success that Mayor Eric Adams recently extended the program to train 3,000 city residents, as part of his Precision Employment Initiative. To meet the demand, we opened up two new training facilities in Brooklyn and the Bronx where we're already training the next generation green economy workforce – right here in New York.

The point is, we can replicate programs like the Civilian Climate Corps in cities all over New York. We can't afford not to.

Investing IRA funds into much-needed clean energy workforce development programs as a prerequisite for the State's future climate change initiatives will deliver a tremendous return on investment in the form of more jobs, increased prosperity, improved health, faster decarbonization and a better place to live for all New York residents.

Thank you for your time.