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New York needs a funded Climate Education and Clean Energy Careers Strategy

New York's nation-leading climate and clean energy goals are only achievable if we have a sizable workforce prepared to meet this challenge, yet the sector remains woefully understaffed, and our existing education and workforce development system isn't currently capable of changing that. We need to go far beyond the discussion of workforce readiness and policy proposals in the State's Climate Plan (NY State Climate Action Council's Scoping Plan). The planning process failed to adequately address these issues, other discussions around the various issues are effectively siloed, and there is no place where the relevant agencies and stakeholders can create a plan to remedy this very serious shortcoming. There is also a mismatch between the scale and types of funding available and what the clean energy sector needs.

There are answers to how NY State can maximize job creation and access. The current gap in preparing our workforce is not insurmountable. Convened in the fall of 2021, the New York State Climate Education and Clean Energy Careers Working Group has brought together dozens of stakeholders from labor, environmental, educational, workforce and community groups to come up with proposals in this field, most of which are included in NY Renews proposed climate and Community protection fund and aligned appropriations. Chief among these is the establishment of an official interagency and stakeholder working group that would be funded and tasked to create and oversee the implementation of a robust Climate Education and Clean Energy Careers strategy.

The Working Group submitted comments on the CLCPA scoping plan to the Climate Action Council, an edited version of which is below, along with a list of endorsers, who concur regarding the urgency of legislative action on the measures recommended.

In order to achieve New York's ambitious climate goals, a massive scaling up of climate and clean energy education and workforce training is needed.

Within the CLCPA, the workforce component is narrowly conceived and does not systematically address the problem overall, including the framework and implementation of a robust just transition. Specific near-term initiatives, including funding, as well as major systemic reforms, are required. From grade schools to colleges and universities, for youth and adult learners, and for the underserved and mid-career workers, we lack a clean energy education and career system sufficient to meet the State's ambitious climate and clean energy goals.

In the fall 2021 the Climate Education and Clean Energy Careers Working Group was convened with a wide range of collaborators from around the state and across the ecosystem to devise a strategy for this purpose, and this testimony will outline our initial proposals. Sectors represented include k-12, unions, colleges and universities, community based organizations, educational non-profits, and professional associations. Working Group members share a sense of the urgency of the situation, and that we need to work towards near term solutions even as we take aim at required structural changes in our education and workforce system.

As in all other aspects of the law, disadvantaged communities should be prioritized and strong labor standards should be adopted.

We urge the State to carry out the following initiatives:

1. As the CLCPA did not provide for the comprehensive analysis and formulation of the education and workforce reforms and initiatives necessary to meet the Act's Goals, **an official Climate Education and Clean Energy Careers Working Group should be formed to develop and implement a strategy to recruit, train,**

and skill up the clean energy workforce required to decarbonize key sectors of New York's economy including buildings, transportation and the power sector.

At least the following should be included: AGENCIES: NYS Education Department, the SUNY and CUNY systems, NYSERDA, the Department of Labor, Empire State Development; STAKEHOLDERS: labor, employers, community-based organizations, educators, workforce development professionals, cultural institutions such as museums, zoos and aquariums.

2. Prioritize climate education and awareness-raising about the benefits of renewable energy.

Successful implementation of the Climate Act depends upon public support and engagement to meet climate goals. It also depends on inspiring young people - and many others - to pursue clean energy careers and create the workforce needed to transform New York's economy.

a. Direct NYSERDA to support a well-funded, long-term statewide public information campaign, utilizing all forms of media as well as outreach by the Clean Energy Hubs in partnership with schools and community-based organizations.

b. Direct the State Education Department to develop comprehensive, globally relevant, interdisciplinary, justice-centered climate education and workforce development programs for New York State's 2.6 million K-12 public school students, in close consultation with stakeholders as discussed in the next point.

d. Fill gaps in climate and clean energy apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, certificate programs, internships and pathways. Streamline and expand programs to make them more accessible.

3. Immediately begin to identify workforce development needs and develop a plan to scale up the workforce for building decarbonization. [The Jobs Study of the Just Transition Working Group](#) estimates that meeting New York's climate goals will create 140,000 jobs related to buildings by 2030. Yet unless New York begins now to develop this workforce, trained workers will not exist to fill these jobs.

a. The Scoping Plan must include a requirement to map out workforce development assets and needs for building efficiency improvements and electrification statewide, and to engage the NYS Education Department, SUNY/CUNY system, community-based organizations, and workforce development, labor and private sector partners to develop and implement a strategy to recruit, train, and skill up the clean energy workforce required to decarbonize the building sector. Specific job tasks, skill sets and qualifications must be included as well as the creation and implementation of a system for tracking those educated and trained over time. This study should be publicly released.

4. As the need is immediate, expedite funding for innovative programs and projects focused on climate change and clean energy education and careers. These can be identified and supported through a process laid out by the newly proposed Climate and Clean Energy Education and Careers Working Group.

Some examples include:

- [Roots of Success workforce readiness program](#) pilots in high schools, prisons, and communities, such as the program that is part of the [Ithaca Green New Deal](#).
- Clean Energy High School Innovation Centers such as the [Chemung Center for Innovation](#) hosted by the [Waverly School District](#).
- Internships such as the [Energy Corps program](#) hosted by the [Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow](#).

5. Assure that the new climate education and clean energy workforce system is inclusive, accessible, and leads to living-wage jobs and careers available to all New Yorkers.

a. In order to have a holistic, strategic, successful implementation of the Climate Action Plan, the state must have an Office of Just Transition and Green Jobs Development with appropriate expertise that can coordinate across all the agencies involved.

b. Aim for a focus on careers with broad skill sets rather than narrow training for specific jobs.

c. Ensure that strong labor standards and protections exist across all clean energy sectors-- including wind, solar, battery storage, EVs, geothermal, and other emerging technologies. For example, utilization of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs to conduct targeted recruitment of women, people of color, veterans, and members of frontline communities for training in construction and related occupations, creating pathways to middle-class careers and strong implementation of the state's labor-peace requirement for operations and maintenance work in renewable energy projects over 5 MW.

d. Fund wraparound support (e.g. childcare, mentoring, transportation, etc) & stipends for WFD programs, prioritizing disadvantaged communities (mirroring CLCPA requirements) frontline community members, and people whose jobs in extractive industries who may need retraining (just transition).

Endorsers of CLCPA Comments: The Alliance for Clean Energy New York (ACENY), Alliance for a Green Economy (AGREE), ALIGN, All Our Energy, Association for Energy Affordability (AEA), Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreational Center (BHCCRC), City of Ithaca, Climate Solutions Accelerator, Communities for Local Power (CLP), Fossil Free Tompkins, FXB USA, Heatsmart Tompkins, Mothers Out Front New York, National Center for Science Education, National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow (NEST), New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP), New York Geothermal Energy Organization (NY-GEO), NYS Laborers Organizing Fund, NY Renews, New Yorkers for Clean Power, The Paleontological Research Institution, PUSH Buffalo, Sierra Club, Solstice Initiative, Southern Door Community Land Trust, Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development (SASD), United University Professions (UUP), Urbecon LLC, Waverly Central School District, WEACTION for Environmental Justice, The Wild Center, Workforce Development Board HMOO, Lehman College Adult Learning Center.

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