



2025

POLICY AGENDA

Campaigns & Initiatives

WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



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INTRODUCTION

The mission of WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) is to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and equitable environmental health and protection policies and practices. WE ACT stands ready to work with administrators and legislators at every level of government to enact change in places where systemic racism and intentional disinvestment have stymied access to healthy environments for communities of color and low-income. Our work is guided by the perspectives and concerns of the residents of Northern Manhattan as well as the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing of 1996.

WE ACT releases an annual policy agenda that outlines our focus for the upcoming year. Our priorities for 2025 include:

- Addressing the cumulative impacts of exposure to pollution, toxic chemicals, and other environmental harms;
- Making sure local, state, and federal climate, energy, and environmental funding equitably improves environmental and climate health outcomes on-the-ground for those most vulnerable;
- Ensuring government accountability and public participation in decision-making processes;
- Retain communities' ability to speak for themselves by encouraging civic engagement and securing robust voter rights and protections;
- Relieving energy insecurity and solidifying affordable and healthy housing as a human right; and
- Facilitating a just and equitable transition toward an energy future that provides direct benefits to those most impacted by the fossil fuel industry, including jobs.



SUMMARY

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
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FUNDING A JUST & EQUITABLE FUTURE

Environmental Bond Act	State	Budget	Ongoing
Equitable Federal Investments Reach Environmental Justice Communities	State; Federal	Advocacy; Budget	Ongoing

ACCOUNTABILITY & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act	Federal	Legislation	Ongoing
Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Implementation	State	Advocacy	Ongoing
Protect Community Input and Public Health in Federal Permitting	Federal	Legislation; Regulatory	Ongoing
Voting Rights for Empowered Communities	Federal	Legislation	To Be Reintroduced

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
CLEAN AIR			
Cumulative Impacts Law (S.1317/A.1286)	State	Legislation	Implementation
Multi-Pollutant Standards	Federal	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
Indoor Air Quality Standards	City	Legislation	In Committee
Congestion Pricing	State	Advocacy	Implementation
ENERGY JUSTICE			
Fighting Liquefied Natural Gas and False Solution Infrastructure	Federal	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
Equitable Clean Energy Siting and Transmission	Federal	Advocacy; Legislation; Regulatory	Ongoing
New York Home Energy Affordable Transition (NY HEAT) Act (S.2016A/A.4592A)	State	Legislation	In Committee
Fighting for Environmental Justice in New York's Cap and Invest Program	State	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
New Efficiency New York (NENY) Proceeding	State	Advocacy; Regulatory	Active Proceeding

Policy Initiative	Level	Policy Type	Status
HEALTHY HOMES			
Social Housing Development Authority	State	Legislation	Introduced
New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Healthy Communities Platform	City; State	Advocacy; Budget	Ongoing
Local Law 97	City	Legislation	Rulemaking
Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund	State	Budget; Executive Plan	Introduced
Achieving Healthy Indoor Air Environments	Federal	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
Healthy Homes First	Federal	Advocacy	Ongoing
EXTREME HEAT			
Indoor Maximum Temperature	City	Legislation	Introduced
Heating and Cooling Relief Act (H.R.6437)	Federal	Legislation	Introduced
Codify Cooling Centers	City	Legislation	Introduced
Equitable Expansion of Cool Pavements	City	Legislation	Introduced
Temperature Extreme Mitigation Program	State	Legislation	Ongoing
Stafford Act Declaration for Extreme Heat	Federal	Legislation	Ongoing

Policy Initiative	Level	Policy Type	Status
Sustainable Land Use			
Funding for Parks	City	Budget	Ongoing
Community Land Act	City	Legislation	In Committee
East Harlem Comprehensive Plan	City; State	Advocacy; Budget	Proposal
Columbia Expansion Bill	State	Advocacy	Ongoing
Community Composting	City	Advocacy	Ongoing
Toxics			
Toxins in Menstrual Products	State	Legislation	Ongoing
Beauty Justice Act (S.4265B/A.6969B)	State	Legislation	Ongoing
Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York City	City	Advocacy	Legislation

FUNDING A JUST & EQUITABLE FUTURE

Environmental Bond Act

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In 2022, New York State voters overwhelmingly approved the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act, which gives the State the ability to borrow \$4.2 billion to invest in much-needed climate mitigation and adaptation projects with a specific focus on equity. While the Bond Act spending is a considerable investment toward the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act's mandate to direct 35 to 40 percent of benefits from State climate action initiatives to disadvantaged communities, New York City residents have not benefited proportionally. Despite being home to nearly 4 million people living in disadvantaged communities, New York City received only \$6 million out of \$313 million disbursed to municipalities as of September 2024.

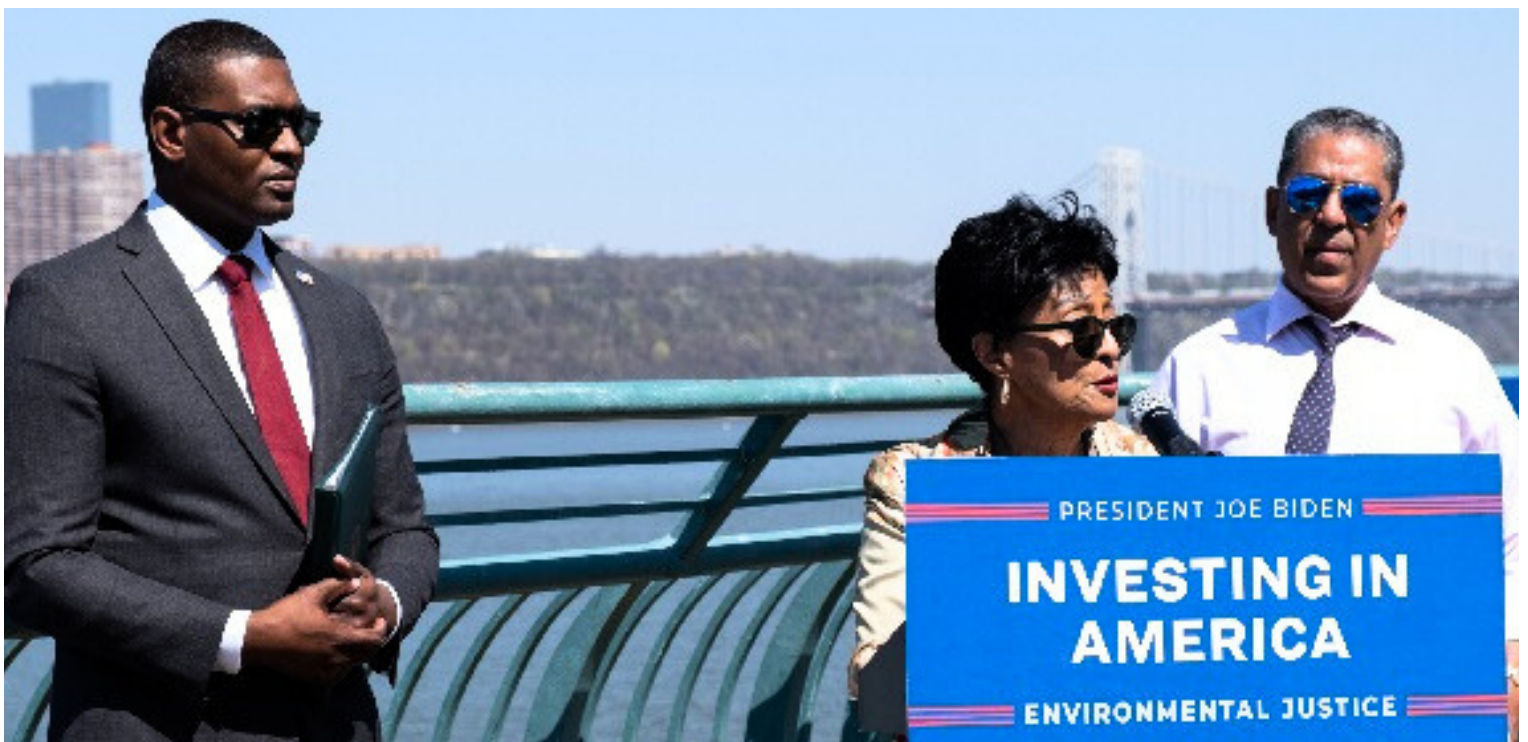
ACTION: In the next wave of Bond Act implementation, WE ACT will continue to advocate for adjustments to the funding formula with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in order to ensure equitable investment in projects that address serious gaps in stormwater management, water quality, and coastal resilience for climate-vulnerable neighborhoods, such as the East Harlem waterfront.

Equitable Federal Investments Reach Environmental Justice Communities

LEVEL: State; Federal
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The Biden administration facilitated unprecedented investments in environmental justice, including significant funding from the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Equitable investments are vital to protect and build healthy communities and address decades of environmental racism.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue to work to ensure that funds from the IIJA and IRA reach communities that have been disproportionately burdened by the negative impacts of climate change and systemically left out of consideration for federal spending. We are committed to working with local, state, and federal officials, through our selection as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2 Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (TCTAC), to ensure that the implementation of the bills delivers critical funding to communities of color and areas of low-income and realizes the potential of these once-in-a-generation investments. In addition, we will continue to advocate for the implementation of Justice40 across federal investments and ensure the yearly appropriations bills fully fund our priorities and exclude harmful riders.



ACCOUNTABILITY & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice For All Act

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: All people have the right to clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment. But for too many, these rights are still unrealized. Systemic barriers - including redlining, intentional disinvestment, and unregulated pollution - have had devastating impacts on communities of color and low-income. These injustices - paired with the cumulative, magnifying impacts of housing, economic, education, and health care injustices - mean that the health and well-being of millions of Americans have been ignored by our government for generations. That is why we need comprehensive environmental justice legislation.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue its integral role in advancing the efforts to pass the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act, a crucial piece of legislation which will address long-standing environmental justice issues. We will work with both the House and Senate to continue advancing this essential bill in the 119th Congress, and continue building support from Members who currently are not sponsors.

Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Implementation

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In 2019, New York State passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), an ambitious climate action law that calls for an 85 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. To ensure effective implementation in these early stages, it is important that the State focuses on disadvantaged communities (DACs) as defined by the State's draft criteria.

ACTION: As a member of the New York State Climate Justice Working Group, WE ACT serves as a permanent advisor to the Climate Action Council, where we work to reject false energy solutions in the State's implementation of the CLCPA to ensure a just transition to a renewable energy future. There is a specific focus on Section 7(3) of the CLCPA, which makes clear that the State cannot make decisions that disproportionately burden disadvantaged communities when implementing the climate law. WE ACT is providing leadership on ensuring the State creates sufficient guidance for implementation of Section 7(3). We will also promote strategies to ensure DACs receive a minimum of 35-40 percent of the benefits from emission reduction programs, as stated in the CLCPA. And we would like to see New York's distributed solar goal raised from 10 gigawatts by 2030 to 20 gigawatts by 2035, increasing community solar in DACs.



Protect Community Input and Public Health in Federal Permitting

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Described as the “People’s Environmental Law,” the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is an essential tool in the fight against environmental racism and injustice, as well as climate injustice. When properly applied, it provides insight and engagement with the federal permitting processes through public participation, transparency, and equitable opportunities for intervention. However, it remains under attack, most recently in the name of quickly deploying “clean” energy projects that prioritize speed over communities, which limits thorough environmental reviews, narrows the scope of federal requirements, and creates additional obstacles for community engagement and participation.

ACTION: WE ACT is a leading advocate working to ensure communities have a voice in federal permitting decisions and achieve a restored and strengthened NEPA. It is critical that the permitting process protects public health and preserves community input, especially of communities of color and of low-income who bear the brunt of pollution and the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis. WE ACT will continue our NEPA advocacy and work to bolster legislation such as the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act, which is essential legislation to ensure that communities are centered, protected, and supported in the consideration of major federal projects.

Voting Rights for Empowered Communities

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: To Be Reintroduced

CONTEXT: The barriers to achieving a just and equitable society have their roots in democratic erosion rising in the U.S. We have seen the rising challenge to democracy from the January 6, 2021 Insurrection, sustained discrediting of traditional media sources, the introduction or passage of countless voter suppression laws since the 2020 election, and an intentional weakening of bedrock human and civil rights policies and practices.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue to pursue passage of Federal legislation like the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which expand voting provisions and reverse or stop voter disenfranchisement efforts that disempower people living in environmental justice communities.



Cumulative Impacts Law (S.1317/A.1286)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Rulemaking

CONTEXT: The simultaneous exposure to multiple environmental hazards can compound adverse health impacts. WE ACT refers to this compounded harm as “cumulative impacts.” Communities of color and low-income often are exposed to multiple environmental hazards such as toxic chemicals, indoor air pollution, and outdoor air pollution due to multiple polluting facilities placed in their neighborhoods, leading to adverse health issues that span generations.

ACTION: With allies, WE ACT successfully encouraged New York State Governor Kathy Hochul to sign the Cumulative Impacts bill into law in 2022. The law requires the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to deny new permit requests of polluting facilities if an existing burden report demonstrates the facility would be contributing to a disproportionate environmental burden on a disadvantaged community. This legislation will also deny the renewal of existing facilities’ permits if they fail to reduce their emissions in the community in which they are located. Now that the bill is law, WE ACT, communities across the state, and allied advocates are providing recommendations to the rulemaking process. The law is set to go into effect as of December 30th, 2024.

Multipollutant Standards

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The power and transportation sectors are major sources of air pollution in the U.S. Power plants and vehicles continue to emit out greenhouse gas emissions and toxic air pollutants that fuel climate change and disproportionately and adversely affect the health of low-income communities, Indigenous populations, and people of color. Starting in 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began the process of developing and updating rules to reduce criteria and toxic air pollutants such as fine particulates, nitrogen oxides, and benzene as well as climate pollutants like carbon and methane from power plants, cars, and trucks. Many regulations were recently finalized, but several critical rules still require development and revision.

ACTION: Since 2022, WE ACT convenes Clean Air for the Long Haul, a focused cohort of environmental justice organizations from across the country working together to participate in the EPA rulemaking process to reduce emissions in the power and transportation sectors. The Clean Air for the Long Haul cohort will remain actively engaged in ongoing and upcoming rulemakings to ensure strong, health-protective standards while also defending the rules the cohort fought hard to strengthen. The cohort will also incorporate environmental justice safeguards that have come under legal attack by industry interests. In addition, through the Climate Action Campaign’s Solutions for Pollution campaign, WE ACT is part of a diverse coalition of stakeholders urging the new administration and the EPA to finalize a broader suite of aggressive and enforceable standards that target reductions in harmful air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions in a manner that does not continue to sacrifice environmental justice communities.



Indoor Air Quality Standards

Level: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: No law sets broad standards for indoor air quality in New York City, even though people spend 80-90 percent of their lives indoors. Fossil fuel appliances, tobacco smoke, outdoor air quality, mold, and pests all impact indoor air quality. Short-term exposure to poor indoor air quality can cause headaches, dizziness, or fatigue. Long-term exposure can cause respiratory diseases, heart disease, or cancer. These harms are not distributed equally across race, income, and gender.

ACTION: In February 2024, the New York City Council introduced bills that aim to set indoor air quality standards in public buildings – including schools. We will be advocating to ensure that any indoor air quality standards prioritize buildings and facilities in environmental justice communities, which experience a greater burden of asthma and other respiratory conditions that are impacted by poor air quality. Establishing indoor air quality standards is a crucial step toward ensuring that we improve the conditions of our indoor environments and create healthier communities.



Congestion Pricing

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy

STATUS: Implementation

CONTEXT: Manhattan is a traffic-heavy borough, where private vehicles, trucks, and buses fill the streets and emit air pollution that harms health. In 2019, then New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a law that establishes congestion pricing below 60th Street in Manhattan. The intention of the legislation is to reduce traffic and raise revenue for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) via a tolling program. In 2024, when the program was scheduled to start, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul decided to pause congestion pricing.

ACTION: Implementing congestion pricing has been a slow process, particularly because it is important to understand potential traffic and air quality implications in environmental justice communities, and to establish parameters to prevent any negative impacts. The program is now scheduled to in January 2025. It is vital that WE ACT and partner organizations continue to uplift and advocate for public transport benefits that would result from a tolling program like crucial environmental and mobility justice upgrades around the city - such as the Second Avenue Subway, elevators at more stations, and improvements to the Access-a-Ride program.



Fighting Liquefied Natural Gas and False Solution Infrastructure

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Within a decade since the U.S. Congress lifted restrictions on the export of liquefied natural gas (LNG), the U.S. has become one of the world's largest exporters of this fossil fuel. There are more than 20 new and expanded proposed LNG terminals, many of them planned in communities already overburdened by the petrochemical industry. Additionally, tax credit expansion, increases in federal funding for unproven carbon management technologies, and recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rulemakings have expanded the threat posed by build-outs of LNG, hydrogen production, and carbon capture infrastructure. These false solutions and LNG terminals and operations threaten to continue the harm fossil fuels inflict on frontline communities and add further burdens to communities already overwhelmed by pollution.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue calling upon the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Federal Regulatory Commission (FERC), EPA, and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to use their authority to halt new and expanded LNG operations, directly address and mitigate climate change, safeguard environmental justice communities, and stabilize domestic energy prices. WE ACT will continue this advocacy campaign, which includes participation in regulatory comment periods, engagement with offices across federal agencies, legislative strategies, congressional outreach, digital ads, and earned media. This work ensures that climate, economic, and environmental justice are considered in environmental reviews, permitting decisions, and public interest determinations – all while combating false solutions and the proliferation of fossil-fuel infrastructure, especially through our Wrong Direction advocacy and public awareness campaign.



Equitable Clean Energy Siting and Transmission

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Legislation; Regulatory
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Transmission lines are high voltage power lines used to transmit energy to populated areas through the electrical grid. With the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Infrastructure Investments and Job Act (IIJA), the U.S. is at a significant crossroad regarding opportunities for transmission planning, siting, and cost allocation. The build-out of transmission lines is an integral component of the clean energy transition, but it must not continue or be built upon discriminatory practices rooted in racism and inequity.

ACTION: It is time to embed foundational principles into the permitting process, including first, early, and ongoing community engagement; requiring environmental justice analysis in the initial analysis and throughout the permitting process; and ensuring effective communication between regulating agencies, developers, and affected communities. WE ACT will continue its advocacy before the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and its Office of Public Participation, and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) as well as members of Congress and other stakeholders to implement legal and regulatory requirements that advance these goals.



New York Home Energy Affordable Transition Act (NY HEAT) (S.2016A/A.4592A)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: Low- and middle-income families are the most impacted by volatile gas heating prices and high energy bills, spending on average 9.3 percent of their household income on energy – three times more than other households. Gas customers in New York State are facing double-digit rate hikes to pay for expensive pipeline replacement programs that prolong the life of our gas system in direct contradiction with the State’s climate goals. To make matters worse, New York State’s “100-foot Rule” requires utilities to connect new customers to a gas line for free based on how close their property is to an existing main gas line, typically within 100 feet. These fossil fuel “subsidies” give new homes free access to our gas system, but are actually paid for by increasing energy bills for everyday New Yorkers.

ACTION: The NY HEAT Act will reduce energy costs for New Yorkers by eliminating wasteful gas subsidies and capping energy bills at 6 percent of a household’s income. A 6-percent cap on energy bills could save low- and middle-income families up to \$75 per month. The NY HEAT Act will also save families money by ending the 100-foot rule, which is costing New Yorkers more than \$200 million every year to unwillingly and unnecessarily expand our gas system. Plus, NY HEAT could redirect up to \$150 billion of New Yorkers’ money toward neighborhood-scale, clean electrification projects – money that would otherwise be spent on replacing old gas pipes with new gas pipes that will become obsolete well before they are paid off by ratepayers. In 2023 and 2024, NY HEAT passed in the New York State Senate but stalled in the Assembly. This year, NY HEAT remains a top priority for WE ACT, with the backing of a broad coalition of environmental advocates across the state.



Fighting for Environmental Justice in New York’s Cap and Invest Program

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: New York State’s 2023 adopted budget included the framework for implementing its Climate Action Council’s recommendation for a cap-and-invest program in the Final Scoping Plan, adopted in December of 2022. The program would set limits on how much greenhouse gas emissions companies would be allowed to emit, getting stricter over time, in line with the State’s Climate Act. Companies would have to purchase allowances to pollute up to the emissions limit and pay penalties if they exceed it. The program design elements, including mechanisms for how the program will protect environmental justice and disadvantaged communities (DACs), remain unclear.

ACTION: As the New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) continue to develop the preliminary program rule, WE ACT will ensure there is focused attention on strict protections for environmental justice communities and that there is an equitable and robust plan to direct investments to DACs.



ENERGY JUSTICE

AFFORDABILITY & ACCESSABILITY

New Efficiency: New York (NENY) Proceeding

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Active Proceeding

CONTEXT: Energy efficiency programs are currently not reaching low-income New Yorkers. New Efficiency: New York (NENY) is a \$5 billion proceeding within the New York State Public Service Commission (PSC) that sets a goal and strategies for building developers, commercial and institutional building owners, industrial facilities, and residential households to pursue improvements that reduce energy consumption across the state. The July 2023 Order outlined a significant shift in the direction of the proceeding by directing utilities and the New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to align their energy efficiency and building electrification (EE/BE) programs with the goals set in the 2019 Climate Act.

ACTION: NYSERDA has been directed to administer low-income programs with a focus on driving benefits to disadvantaged communities (DACs) but has historically not performed well in this area. WE ACT is intervening in the NENY proceeding with our partners in the Energy Efficiency for All and Better Buildings New York coalitions and the Energy Democracy Alliance to advance solutions that will direct a significant amount of money to ensure EE/BE programs go to DACs.

HEALTHY HOMES

HOUSING JUSTICE

Social Housing Development Authority

Level: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: Every person deserves a safe, decent, affordable home, but the private market alone has not and will not meet the housing needs of all New Yorkers. Public subsidies for private development consistently fail to achieve safe, decent, affordable housing for all income levels, forcing New Yorkers to deal with skyrocketing rents, rising eviction rates, and working families fleeing the state in droves in search of lower housing costs. The New York City Housing & Vacancy Survey (HVS) for 2023 found a rental vacancy rate of 1.4 percent - the lowest it has been since 1968. Meanwhile, an estimated 350,000 New Yorkers do not have a place to call home and over half of New York renters are spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent.

ACTION: The Social Housing Development Authority (SHDA) is a bold new program to transform New York State's housing for the public good. The SHDA would be a new, well-funded, state-level public authority that's able to build, acquire, and renovate permanently affordable housing for public and community ownership, using 100-percent union labor. A public authority tasked with building and rehabilitating housing for public good rather than private profit will enable New York to meet the challenge of the housing crisis efficiently and at scale. The public sector will make better use of rental assistance vouchers to secure deeper affordability for very low-income New Yorkers, while the new authority structure will bring together different government functions to reduce bureaucracy. Social Housing is an umbrella term for housing that is permanently affordable, protected from market forces, and prioritizes community ownership and democratic control.

HEALTHY HOMES

PUBLIC HOUSING

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Healthy Communities Platform

Level: City, State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Budget

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Historically, the health and safety of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents have been negatively impacted by poor building infrastructure and other issues related to operations and accountability, most of which are tied to the fact that NYCHA has been chronically underfunded for decades. As a result, the New Yorkers who rent apartments in NYCHA developments often have to endure environmental threats such as mold, lead, and pests along with substandard service in terms of repairs and other basic issues.

ACTION: In 2025, WE ACT will advocate for NYCHA to prioritize decarbonization, weatherization, expanding resiliency infrastructure, and remediating environmental health hazards. In addition, we will advocate for more funding from New York State for initiatives like NYCHA's Clean Heat Challenge. WE ACT's NYCHA Working Group will engage with residents across Northern Manhattan on issues related to environmental health and environmental justice; specifically, our NYCHA Working Group will investigate resident safety and security as well as NYCHA operations (e.g., lead, mold, sustainability, sanitation, and other important topics). The NYCHA Working Group is also organizing to insist that NYCHA properly engages residents and does meaningful outreach to residents about the RAD/PACT Program and Public Housing Preservation Trust.



HEALTHY HOMES

MOVING OFF FOSSIL FUELS

Local Law 97

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Rulemaking

CONTEXT: In New York City, buildings burning fossil fuels account for about 70 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, making that infrastructure the most significant local contributor to the climate crisis. In 2019, to address this issue, the New York City Council passed Local Law 97, a landmark law mandating that buildings larger than 25,000 square feet cut their emissions 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050. While this is a significant step in the right direction, equitable implementation of this law won't happen naturally; watchdogs and community representatives must be at the decision-making table.

ACTION: In September 2024, New York City's Department of Buildings proposed the final set of rules to govern Local Law 97's implementation and enforcement. WE ACT is working with other advocates to pressure New York City Mayor Eric Adam's administration to equitably implement Local Law 97 without weakening the law during the rulemaking process.



Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Budget

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: Low-income households often face the biggest barriers to energy efficiency, weatherization, and electrification due to living in older housing stock with deferred maintenance that prevents basic energy upgrades that make homes more affordable, comfortable, and healthy. For example, homes that have environmental health hazards like lead, mold, and asbestos, or other code violations, will have to resolve these issues before they can qualify for energy efficiency or electrification interventions. This pre-electrification work is usually too costly for homeowners and building owners to take on themselves and is not currently funded by existing state programs.

ACTION: The \$200 million Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund is a proposed program administered by the New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), in consultation with the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), to fund and provide technical assistance for homes and buildings in need of a wide-range of currently unfunded retrofits that are necessary for healthy buildings and the achievement of New York's climate mandates. The GAP Fund will help households address deferred maintenance issues and eliminate legacy environmental hazards like lead, mold, old roofs, and poor ventilation. By eliminating the overlapping physical and economic structural barriers to electrification, the GAP Fund is an essential first step to ensuring vulnerable New Yorkers have access to healthy and affordable electrified homes.



Achieving Healthy Indoor Air Environments

LEVEL: State; Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In 2022, WE ACT completed its Out of Gas, In with Justice pilot project, which examined the air quality impacts of replacing gas stoves with electric induction stoves in 10 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) apartments in the Bronx. The final report, released in 2023, breaks down the health benefits of electrification in affordable and public housing, the social acceptance of electric appliances, and the infrastructure needs of existing buildings for policy makers and advocates who seek to advance equitable building decarbonization policies. These results have informed our understanding of the deep connection between decarbonization retrofits and healthy housing upgrades that are linked to decades-old issues such as unremediated lead paint, asbestos, and mold as well as energy inefficiency problems and toxic emissions from appliances that burn fossil fuels.

ACTIONS: WE ACT will continue to leverage the data findings to advance healthy housing, energy efficiency, and clean air policies and practices at every level of government. This includes continuing to support the use of funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act to build healthy, decarbonized communities in New York and across the nation.

Healthy Homes First Campaign

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: WE ACT believes that everyone deserves to live in a safe and healthy environment, free from the dangers of pollution and substandard living conditions. Yet, this is not the reality for low-income households and people of color who live in poorly maintained, older buildings, and experience indoor health hazards such as lead, mold, and toxic air pollution from fossil fuel appliances. As we see historic investments in climate solutions for buildings, we need to put healthy homes first, ensuring that the necessary maintenance, upgrades, and remediation of indoor health hazards in public and other affordable housing are completed so disadvantaged communities can meaningfully reap the benefits of building decarbonization.

ACTIONS: WE ACT's Healthy Homes First campaign focuses on whole-home upgrades, improving public and other affordable housing to ensure that households are living in safer, healthier, and more energy-efficient environments. The goal is to build awareness and advocate for federal policies, legislation, program reforms, and investments that prioritize safe housing, improved indoor air quality, and the removal of health hazards from disadvantaged communities - in addition to advancing weatherization, energy efficiency, and building electrification. Through this campaign, WE ACT will showcase the need for upgrading public and other affordable housing while driving a national narrative that the transition to pollution-free buildings is essential for the mitigation of the climate crisis.



EXTREME HEAT

Indoor Maximum Temperature

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Introduced

CONTEXT: New York City housing code has provisions to protect tenants from dangerously cold temperatures from October to May, but there is no equivalent legislation to protect tenants from dangerously hot temperatures from May to October. Increasingly, New York is exposed to both hot and cold weather extremes, and our housing code should reflect that. Municipalities in states like Maryland, Arizona, and Texas have already implemented requirements for landlords and developers to share some of the responsibility to provide cooling. The current model that relies on tenants to purchase and run air conditioners during extreme heat events perpetuates heat stress and premature mortality. Heat-exacerbated deaths have been increasing in the past decade, mainly due to “non-extreme hot days” of 82°F or higher but below the extreme heat threshold. On days within this temperature range, cooling centers are not available in New York City.

ACTION: Since 2020, WE ACT’s annual Extreme Heat Policy Agendas have highlighted this policy strategy to the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, which incorporated it into PlaNYC, New York City’s long-term strategic climate plan. By engaging with allies in the New York City Council, community members, housing advocates, and environmental and climate health scientists, WE ACT will provide thought leadership to create an indoor maximum temperature strategy that focuses on energy efficiency, sustainable cooling, and maintaining grid reliability.

Heating and Cooling Relief Act (H.R.6437)

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Re-Introduced

CONTEXT: National research on household energy burdens indicates that low-income households spend three times more of their income on energy costs. In New York alone, utility debt was more than \$2.1 billion in March 2020. With mounting energy costs, many low-income communities and communities of color are forced to choose between paying the energy bill or purchasing food or important medications. Yet the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) - a federally-funded, state-implemented program designed to help low-income and vulnerable households with their energy bills - is severely underfunded and unprepared to support households in our changing climate. The Heating and Cooling Relief Act takes steps to help reduce the energy burdens of LIHEAP recipients as well as cope with extreme weather by investing more in weatherization and increasing funding to the program.

ACTION: This bill will address the energy burden by increasing the authorized annual spending for LIHEAP from \$3.8 million to \$40 billion. Additionally, the bill would provide emergency funds to families who are paying higher energy bills due to increased air-conditioning usage during extreme heat seasons. U.S. Senator Edward Markey and former U.S. Representative Jamaal Bowman reintroduced the bill in the 118th Congress. WE ACT will continue work with legislators to reintroduce the Heating and Cooling Act in 119th Congress in 2025 and garner support from key stakeholders to get this comprehensive bill passed.



Codify Cooling Centers

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Re-Introduced

CONTEXT: New York City will always need free, publicly accessible spaces for relief from the heat as long as people are unhoused or can't afford access to cooling at home. The City's Cooling Center program is an essential safety net for communities that experience extreme heat, especially for households that do not have an air conditioner or cannot afford the utility costs associated with running one. However, the program is in many ways ad hoc. It has no budget, little consistency, and some neighborhoods lack a cooling center within a five-minute walking distance. The program is also underutilized due to insufficient wayfinding, signage, and advertisements. Community members have given us recommendations on how to remedy these issues, but the solutions require thoughtful investment.

ACTION: Introduction 0998-2024 would codify the City's Cooling Center program. The legislation would grant the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with New York City Emergency Management, the discretion of designating the number and location of Cooling Centers, but would require that there be no fewer than the median number of Cooling Centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017. In designating such centers, the agencies would have to take into account where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use centers. DOHMH would also be required to post information about the cooling center program on its website and would also have to conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality. In addition, DOHMH would have to conduct an annual survey on utilization of the program and submit a report on the program to the Mayor and City Council annually. Finally, the codification of the program would allow the City to better allocate resources to improve awareness of the program and address barriers to access. While the new, always-accessible Cool Options map allows residents to better plan for heat emergencies, it is in no way a replacement for the comprehensive community outreach, staff training, program reporting, and community feedback mechanisms that Introduction 0998-2024 would facilitate.



Equitable Expansion of Cool Pavements

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Re-Introduced

CONTEXT: Cool pavement is an important form of green infrastructure that can provide immediate relief to neighborhoods and commercial corridors with limited tree canopy. A cool pavement pilot in Phoenix, Arizona found that streets with cool pavement had an average surface temperature 10.5 to 12 degrees Fahrenheit lower than traditional asphalt at noon and during the afternoon hours.

ACTION: Introduction 0928-2024 lays the foundation to convert streets that currently exacerbate the Urban Heat Island effect into climate mitigation assets. This bill would require the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) to conduct a pilot project, in consultation with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), on the use of cool pavement - pavement and pavement coatings designed to keep area temperatures cooler than traditional asphalt and thus combat the Urban Heat Island effect - on city streets. The pilot is required to include at least four neighborhoods that are, or include, both disadvantaged communities and heat vulnerable communities (as defined by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and DOHMH's Heat Vulnerability Index). The DOT must then submit a report to the Mayor and City Council on the results of the pilot project 6 months after the completion of the study. This action is a necessary complement to the passage of Local Law 184, the Urban Forest Plan, which seeks to expand canopy cover to 30 percent, because even as new tree plantings in the public right of way are prioritized in heat vulnerable neighborhoods, trees take several years to reach a mature age at which they can offer shade and cooling benefits. Cool pavement can lower surface temperatures immediately and can offer cooling in locations where trees cannot be planted.

Temperature Extreme Mitigation Program Act (formerly S.1604/A.3321)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: There are currently no workplace protections requiring employers to ensure that their workers can safely endure extreme weather in New York State. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates a total of 986 workers across all industry sectors in the U.S. died from exposure to heat between 1992 and 2022, with construction workers representing 34 percent of the deceased. Certain industries subject employees to a heightened risk of heat stress because they work in conditions with sustained, direct sun exposure; strenuous labor; lack of temperature control; or mechanical heat waste from industrial equipment. This is common in sectors like agriculture, construction, delivery, and food service, wherein workers are more vulnerable to underemployment, wage theft, and racial and national origin discrimination.

ACTION: The Temperature Extreme Mitigation Program Act seeks to hold employers in agriculture, construction, warehousing, delivery, retail, car wash, and food service industries accountable for providing workers with a safe occupational environment. This would entail employers equipping workers with hydration, paid 10-minute cool-down breaks, acclimatization periods for new employees, shade stations, air conditioning, heat safety training, personal protective equipment, multilingual signage about temperature protections, a comprehensive extreme temperature adaptation plan, and whistleblower protections. These measures would take effect when temperatures exceed 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

Stafford Act Declaration for Extreme Heat

LEVEL: Federal
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Re-Introduced

CONTEXT: The Stafford Act is a federal statute that empowers the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to release disaster response and recovery funds for emergencies and natural disasters. Extreme heat is the deadliest impact of climate change, disproportionately impacting communities of color and low-income, yet it has never been designated as either an emergency or a natural disaster. Therefore, municipalities and states have not received federal resources to respond to emergency heat events that have become more frequent and intense and threaten human health, damage infrastructure, and strain electrical grids. Recently, it has been affirmed that the Act can be revised to include extreme heat and there is mounting pressure to do so.

ACTION: The Extreme Heat Emergency Act (S.4898/H.R.3965) would require FEMA to directly respond to extreme heat events in its pre-disaster hazard mitigation, response, and recovery capacities. This could supplement funding for a range of adaptation and mitigation solutions from other agencies, supporting the improvement of cooling center programs, the establishment of resiliency hubs, investment in nature-based solutions and green infrastructure, and passive cooling building upgrades. WE ACT will engage FEMA and work with legislators to ensure this bill is re-introduced and passed in the 119th Congress.



SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

Funding for Parks

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Budget

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Over the past 40 years, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) has received inadequate funding for maintenance and operations despite the critical role it plays in the public life and resiliency efforts of New York City neighborhoods. While other major cities across the U.S. spend anywhere from 1.5 to 5 percent of their overall budget on parks, New York City spends just 0.6 percent, a woefully insufficient amount. NYC Parks is responsible for a 30,000-acre park system which includes our greenspaces, playgrounds, pools, beaches, waterfront, and athletic facilities. NYC Parks is also responsible for all trees planted in public spaces, including street trees, which account for 53 percent of the city's tree canopy. Trees, grass, and vegetation are all important environmental assets that help combat the Urban Heat Island effect, which impacts dense cities like New York more, and Black and Latinx neighborhoods the most. Today, formerly redlined neighborhoods are an average of 5 degrees Fahrenheit hotter in the summer than non-redlined areas due to less tree coverage and access to parks.

ACTION: WE ACT is a proud member of the Play Fair for Parks campaign, a coalition of 400-plus groups and organizations advocating for New York City's parks and open spaces. The Play Fair coalition is calling on the Mayor and the City Council to dedicate more of the City's budget to NYC Parks so that New Yorkers can finally secure the equitable, 21st-century parks system they deserve. WE ACT, in particular, wants to see additional funding for NYC Parks dedicated to the expansion and maintenance of greenspace, tree canopy, and waterfront access in formerly redlined neighborhoods in Northern Manhattan and the South Bronx.

Community Land Act

Level: City

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: In Committee

CONTEXT: Land is a valuable and inelastic resource in New York City. For decades, landlords, private equity firms, and corporations have leveraged their market power to buy land in low-income neighborhoods - often flipping properties to build new luxury developments or enabling environmentally harmful activities that are not in line with community needs - which frequently exacerbates local housing, health, and environmental crises in the name of profit. On some occasions, valuable publicly-owned land

is sold by New York City to for-profit developers at steeply discounted prices, which can exacerbate gentrification.

ACTION: The Community Land Act is an urgently-needed set of bills that give community land trusts (CLTs) and other nonprofits tools to acquire and steward land in their communities in a way that better serves neighborhood needs. This could include the development and preservation of permanently-affordable housing, community and commercial spaces, parks, greenspaces, and other critical needs. The bill package consists of two bills: the Community Opportunity to Purchase Act and Public Land for Public Good. WE ACT will continue to work with the Community Land Act campaign, organized and led by the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI), to pass these critical pieces of legislation.

East Harlem Comprehensive Plan

LEVEL: City; State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Budget

STATUS: Proposal

CONTEXT: A steadfast anchor for Latinx social and economic life, East Harlem has been the birthplace of some of the country's most prominent cultural, political, and religious movements and icons. However, years of disinvestment, neglect, and short-sighted planning from the public and private sectors have stifled opportunity, undermined living standards, and allowed severe racial, economic, and environmental disparities to proliferate. This neighborhood has one of the highest heat vulnerability indexes in the city, averaging 2 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the city average in August, and is one of Manhattan's most flood-vulnerable neighborhoods. Now, East Harlem is on the verge of an unprecedented transformation due to the expansion of the Second Avenue Subway at 106th Street, 116th Street, and 125th Street. Without community-driven solutions, low-income communities of color in the neighborhood will continue to be hit the hardest by the harmful effects of gentrification.

ACTION: WE ACT is working with City and State agencies and legislators to create a comprehensive resiliency plan for East Harlem that will harness newly available federal and state funding to expand green infrastructure, fill existing gaps in waterfront revitalization plans, ensure the equitable construction of the Second Avenue Subway, and implement WE ACT's East 125th Street Community Visioning Action Plan. These investments will catalyze the economic, cultural, and sustainable revitalization of East Harlem by leveraging the cultural heritage and assets of the neighborhood as both a driver and enabler of economic development, a conduit to mitigate gentrification, and advance greater climate resilience and environmental sustainability.

Columbia Expansion Bill

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The continuous expansion of Columbia University has contributed to the gentrification and displacement of long-time residents from West Harlem - particularly impacting low-income residents and those of color. As Columbia has expanded uptown, the Black and Latinx populations of the neighborhood have declined by more than 2,000 families, and experienced more than 1,000 evictions since 2017. In addition, although the university signed a Community Benefits Agreement with the West Harlem Development Corporation in 2009, which was intended to ensure that Columbia's expansion created benefits for Harlem, many of those promises remain unfulfilled, with only six of its 39 Community Benefit Agreement promises completed and less than \$1 million of a promised \$20 million affordable housing fund spent in the 15 years since the agreement was signed. The verdict is clear: Columbia's expansion has not had a positive impact on West Harlem and there's a need to reevaluate the university's expansion goals.

ACTION: WE ACT is partnering with Defend Harlem/New York Interfaith Commission for Housing Equality and New York State Senator Cordell Cleare to push for the repeal of Columbia's Mixed Use Development Plan, a long-term zoning and redevelopment plan approved for Columbia in 2008 by the Empire State Development Corporation. In addition, passage of the Community Land Act, another of WE ACT's priorities, would help slow gentrification and ensure that the remaining underdeveloped land in Northern Manhattan is able to be converted into community-controlled, permanently-affordable housing, businesses, and green spaces.

Community Composting

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: The passage of the Zero Waste Act has set in motion the next stage in how New York City handles and processes the food waste it will be required to collect. The City appears poised to create a waste infrastructure whose primary use for food waste is as feedstock for the creation of biogas, specifically biomethane, which produces harmful emissions when used as an energy source. Furthermore, the City will begin significantly cutting funding for community composting sites starting in 2025. This approach to composting will put our local network of community composters at risk. Without concerted action, New York City will lose this opportunity to establish composting as a fully-funded solution for the processing of organic waste into healthy soil.

ACTION: WE ACT urges the City to formally designate composting as the primary and best solution for processing New York City's food waste. Composting is a circular practice that minimizes the lifecycle emissions of greenhouse gasses. WE ACT is a member of Save Our Compost NYC, a coalition of New York City organizations working to support and expand community composting to uplift environmental and climate justice. We are urging the City to embrace composting as a key and vital solution for the management of New York City's organic waste that reduces greenhouse gases, restores soil health, mitigates flooding, offers green jobs, and fosters community cohesion. To support this, members of WE ACT's Climate Justice Working Group are working to educate Northern Manhattan residents on how to properly separate and dispose of household waste.



TOXICS

BEAUTY INSIDE OUT

Toxins in Menstrual Products (S.3529A/A.5990A)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Many menstrual products are laced with toxic chemicals, such as parabens and phthalates, which pose significant health risks, including hormone disruption and reproductive issues. The presence of these harmful substances in commonly used products raises concerns about their safety and long-term effects on health. As the research on the toxicity of ingredients grows, the need for legislation becomes increasingly clear.

ACTION: As co-chair of the JustGreen Partnership, a coalition of more than 60 organizations across New York State working to pass environmental health policies, WE ACT is advocating for legislation to restrict toxic chemicals in menstrual products. This effort emphasizes the need for safer options that protect the health of people who menstruate.

Beauty Justice Act (S.4265B/A.6969B)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: There are many toxic chemicals in personal care products (e.g., soaps, cosmetics, hair straighteners, etc.), which have been linked to cancer, infertility, miscarriage, poor infant and maternal health outcomes, obesity, asthma, and many other serious health concerns. Due to the societal elevation of white beauty standards and aggressive targeted marketing, young women and femme-identifying people of color have higher rates of use for these harmful products.

ACTION: As co-chair of the JustGreen Partnership, a coalition of more than 60 organizations across New York State working to pass environmental health policies, WE ACT is advocating for the passage of a bill to ban the most dangerous toxic chemicals in personal care and beauty products sold in New York State.

TOXICS

PREVENTING CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning in New York City

LEVEL: City
POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Legislation
STATUS: In Committee; Ongoing

CONTEXT: Lead exposure can cause damage at any age, but it is particularly dangerous for young children. Though lead exposure has been declining in New York City for more than a decade, in 2019, the New York City Comptroller's Office found that 11,972 children diagnosed with lead exposure (5 mcg/dL or greater) were living in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) apartments that should have been lead-free years ago. The report also identified a severe lack of enforcement of Local Law 1 of 2004, which was designed to eradicate childhood lead poisoning by 2010.

ACTION: WE ACT is a founding member of the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning (NYCCELP), and we anchor a roundtable of lead poisoning prevention advocates, including Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, New York City League of Conservation Voters, Cooper Square Committee, and Montefiore Hospital, to name a few. Since 2019, the roundtable group has helped get 22 bills passed to improve lead poisoning prevention policies in New York City. In 2025, NYCCELP will focus on the enforcement of these laws, tenant and worker protections, removing lead service lines, and increasing public awareness through education and outreach.

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