



2026

POLICY AGENDA

Campaigns & Initiatives

WE ACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



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POLICY AGENDA INTRODUCTION

The mission of WE ACT for Environmental Justice 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 Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing of 1996, and our focus is on the communities of Northern Manhattan. These are the policy priorities we have identified for 2026.

2025 POLICY WINS

New York City

Indoor Maximum Temperature

Codifying New York City's Cooling Center Program

Cool Pavement Pilot Program Paves Path for Cooler Communities

New York State

Banning PFAS and Other Toxic Chemicals from Menstrual Products

Saving \$200 Million Annual on Energy Bills by Repealing the 100-Foot Rule

Legal Victory to Defend the New York State Climate Act

Secured \$2 Million for GAP Fund Pilot Program

Federal/Global

Keeping LIHEAP Alive with a \$20-Million Increase

Phasing Out Mercury from Dental Amalgam at UN's Minamata Convention

SUMMARY

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
BUILDING DECARBONIZATION			
Lower- and Middle-Income Energy Efficiency/Building Electrification (LMI EE/BE)	State	Advocacy; Regulatory	Active Proceeding
Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund	State	Legislation; Budget	In Committee
CLEAN AIR			
Holding the Line on Strong Environmental Protections	Federal	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
Clean Air Initiative (New York's Cap-and-Invest Program)	State	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
CLIMATE & ENERGY JUSTICE			
Defending Clean Energy and Fighting Fossil Fuel Infrastructure	Federal; State	Advocacy; Regulatory	Ongoing
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)	Federal; State	Legislation; Budget	Ongoing
Data Center Expansion	State; Federal	Advocacy; Legislation; Regulatory	Ongoing
New York City Peaker Plant Shutdowns	City; State	Advocacy	Ongoing

Policy Initiative	Level	Policy Type	Status
Environmental Justice & Democracy			
Democracy Defense	Federal	Legislation; Regulatory	To Be Reintroduced
A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act (EJ4All)	Federal	Legislation	Ongoing
Defending Federal Environmental Justice Policy and Funding Infrastructure	Federal	Advocacy; Budget	Ongoing
Environmental Justice NYC (EJNYC)	City	Law	Ongoing
Healthy Homes			
Healthy Homes First Campaign	Federal; State	Advocacy	Ongoing
Lead Paint Right to Know Act (Pending)	State	Legislation	To Be Reintroduced
Indoor Maximum Temperature	City	Legislation	Introduced
Open & Green Space			
Our Parks, Our Backyard: Improving Northern Manhattan Parks	City	Budget	Ongoing
Sustainable Land Use			
Protect Community Input and Public Health in Federal Permitting	Federal	Legislation; Regulatory	Ongoing
Environmental Justice Siting Law (S.1317/A.1286)	State	Law	Awaiting Phase II Proposed Rules
East Harlem Climate and Community Master Plan	City; State	Advocacy; Budget	Proposal
Community Land Act	City	Legislation	In Committee

POLICY INITIATIVE	LEVEL	POLICY TYPE	STATUS
TOXIC-FREE PRODUCTS			
Beauty Justice Act (S.2057A/A.2054A)	State	Legislation	Passed Senate; Assembly Advocacy
WASTE & SANITATION			
Organic Waste Diversion	City	Advocacy	Ongoing



BUILDING DECARBONIZATION

Lower- and Middle-Income Energy Efficiency/Building Electrification (LMI EE/BE)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Active Proceeding

CONTEXT: Energy efficiency and building electrification programs have not been reaching low-income New Yorkers for a host of reasons, including chronic underfunding, poor design, and poor program delivery. New York State's comprehensive energy efficiency initiative (New Efficiency: New York, or NENY) is a now \$5 billion proceeding within the Public Service Commission (PSC) that directs utilities and the New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to develop and deliver their energy efficiency and building electrification (EE/BE) programs according to a new Strategic Framework that focuses on weatherization to align with the goals set in the 2019 Climate Act.

ACTION: Con Edison and National Grid have been directed to administer low-income programs with a focus on driving benefits to disadvantaged communities (DACs) but have historically not performed well in this area. Since securing a more than four-fold increase in the low-to-moderate-income (LMI) portfolio of programs, WE ACT will be working with our partners to advance a community-driven performance measurement framework and stakeholder engagement process that will include an interim budget review to ensure EE/BE programs go to DACs.

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 to 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: In May 2025, as part of New York State's final budget, the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund was funded as a \$2 million pilot. Although it falls well-short of the funding needed to address barriers to pre-electrification across the state, this seed funding will start to address energy affordability and pollution reduction in neighborhoods that have long been overburdened and under-resourced. WE ACT will continue to push for the program to be made permanent and receive a substantial and durable investment from the state; prioritizing spending in environmental justice communities. 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.



Holding the Line on Strong Environmental Protections

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Regulatory

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Indigenous, low-income, and communities of color are affected the most from toxic air pollution and the impacts of climate change. The energy and transportation sectors release harmful air and climate emissions in or near environmental justice communities, leading to negative health impacts, from asthma and heart attacks to developmental problems and even death. From 2021-2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) strengthened and finalized environmental standards to reduce common and toxic air pollutants such as fine particulates (soot), nitrogen oxides, benzene, and formaldehyde as well as climate change-driving pollutants like carbon dioxide and methane from power plants, vehicles, and oil and gas sites like wells, storage tanks, and pipelines. Many of these environmental protections are now at risk of being weakened or reversed.

ACTION: Since 2022, WE ACT has led Clean Air for the Long Haul, a national cohort of environmental justice organizations who work together to push for strong EPA rules that cut pollution from the energy, power, and transportation sectors. This coalition fought hard to ensure that these emission standards safeguard the health of environmental justice communities. Together, through advocacy, awareness campaigns, active participation in ongoing and upcoming rulemakings, and - if necessary - legal action, we will defend against the rollback of these clean air protections that continue the legacy of sacrificing our communities to pollution.

Clean Air Initiative (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 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 communities, which the state refers to as disadvantaged communities (DACs), remain unclear.

ACTION: As the New York State Research and Development Authority (NYSDA) 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.



CLIMATE & ENERGY JUSTICE

Defending Clean Energy and Fighting Fossil Fuel Infrastructure

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

CONTEXT: This decade is a turning point for U.S. energy policy. While clean energy has gained momentum through federal investments, the federal government is also expanding fossil fuel infrastructure: lifting liquefied natural gas (LNG) export limits, backing risky carbon capture, and expanding polluting data centers. The Trump administration's "energy dominance" agenda fast-tracks fossil fuels while blocking clean energy like solar and wind through canceled funding, permit denials, and regulatory rollbacks. With dozens of LNG terminals planned - many in overburdened communities - and tax breaks for unproven energy technologies, these actions threaten to lock in fossil fuel dependence and deepen environmental injustice for decades to come.

ACTION: Through our Wrong Direction advocacy and public awareness campaign, WE ACT will work to block the expansion of additional fossil fuel infrastructure as well as preserve and expand the clean energy wins from the first half of the decade. We will continue calling upon the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Federal Regulatory Commission (FERC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to use their authority to halt new and expanded LNG operations, directly tackle climate change through emissions regulations and renewable energy development, safeguard environmental justice communities, and stabilize domestic energy prices. Additionally, we will combat new and emerging threats to communities like the siting of AI Data centers as well as carbon capture and storage infrastructure. As part of this campaign, WE ACT will keep advocating, through participating in regulatory comment periods, engaging federal agencies, Congressional outreach, digital ads, and earned media to ensure that climate, economic, and environmental justice are considered in environmental reviews, permitting decisions, and policy decisions around renewable energy and fossil fuel infrastructure expansion at all levels of government.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

LEVEL: Federal, State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Budget
STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, one out of six families in America are currently behind on their home energy bills, and the total amount these families owe for their utilities is approximately \$21 billion. In New York State, as of December 2023, over 1.4 million households, about one in six New Yorkers, are at least 60 days or more behind on their energy bills - collectively owing nearly \$2 billion in unpaid bills. In May 2025 alone, this resulted in approximately 61,000 households in New York State having their electric or gas service shut off, setting a record high as reported by the Public Utility Law Project. Moreover, 50 percent of heat-related deaths in New York City are among Black people, even though they make up only 25 percent of the city's population. As energy costs and climate-fueled extreme weather events rise, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally-funded, state-implemented program that helps households struggling to pay their utility bills by providing heating and cooling relief. This popular and bipartisan program is severely underfunded and unprepared to support the growing need in our changing climate. Our [latest report](#) showed that over the past three summers, New York State has run out of funds for summer cooling as early as July. LIHEAP is also under attack at the federal level. The proposed presidential fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget aims to eliminate this program without providing a replacement to support the approximately 6 million homes across the country that LIHEAP assists. In April 2025, the Trump administration fired the entire staff overseeing LIHEAP, putting [6.2 million people at risk nationwide](#) - including [more than 1.1 million households in New York State](#).

ACTION: In 2025, WE ACT led a sign-on letter and participated in a lobby day on Capitol Hill, alongside other environmental justice and allied partners, demanding that the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program be fully staffed and adequately funded in the FY 2026 budget bill. As a result of our advocacy, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees voted not only to reject the Trump administration's request to eliminate LIHEAP, but to increase its funding levels by as much as \$20 million in FY2026. We will continue this defense of the program in 2026 to ensure that communities of color and low-income experiencing high energy burdens and coping with extreme weather have access to the life-saving support LIHEAP provides. WE ACT will also keep working with legislators Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Representative Yassamin Ansari of Arizona to garner support from key stakeholders to get the Heating and Cooling Relief Act passed. This bill aims to boost LIHEAP funding and expand eligibility to ensure year-round heating and cooling assistance for low-income households experiencing high energy burdens, invest in weather-proofing and electrification of homes, protect against utility shutoffs, and expand emergency assistance for extreme weather impacts.



Data Center Expansion

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

CONTEXT: The recent, unregulated, and often reckless build out of data centers for artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency mining, and other uses has ignored public health, environmental, and economic impacts on communities in which they are sited. Data centers require large amounts of energy and water to operate, leading to increased energy bills, increased air and water pollution, and a high risk of electrical grid blackouts. Developers have repeatedly dodged permitting processes that are legally required. Affected communities - like those in Prince George's County, Maryland, and Memphis, Tennessee - have organized significant resistance to these facilities in their neighborhoods. The large technology companies developing these centers have clearly shown an intention to introduce a new form of environmental injustice that will only serve to worsen already present harms in our communities.

ACTION: WE ACT will advocate for comprehensive policy measures to ensure sustainable energy use, prevent growing fossil fuel infrastructure, and the negative economic, health, and environmental effects of data center development on environmental justice communities. Until community right to self-determination is respected and community voices are meaningfully heard and incorporated in all stages of development, WE ACT will remain steadfast in our opposition to data center buildout and will explore and promote advocacy, administrative enforcement, and legislative pathways to accompany this opposition.

New York City Peaker Plant Shutdowns

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

CONTEXT: New York City relies primarily on fossil fuel plants to meet its energy demand. Throughout the year, there are periods when the electric grid is unable to support 'peak' energy demand - particularly on hot summer days when air conditioning usage is high. Gas and oil power plants known as peaker plants are intended to meet this extra demand and are only supposed to be active a few hours throughout the year, specifically during these periods of peak demand. Peaker plants - often sited in environmental justice communities - lack the proper technology to manage the resulting pollution which has detrimental impacts on their surrounding environments. Additionally, concerns over elevated capacity factor - or how often a plant is used - for New York City peaker plants indicates they are being used in an inappropriate manner - not as a stop gap to meet peak needs, but rather as a plant intended to operate more regularly.

ACTION: WE ACT is taking a comprehensive approach to shut down New York City's polluting peaker plants by combining education, advocacy, and community power to inform the public about what peaker plants are and the harms they cause, holding listening sessions in frontline communities, and supporting local organizations leading this work. We are also pushing for a just transition - ensuring peaker plant sites are repurposed for clean energy solutions like renewable energy battery storage - so that closing these plants not only reduces pollution but also creates healthier, more resilient neighborhoods.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & DEMOCRACY

Democracy Defense

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Legislation; Regulatory

STATUS: To Be Reintroduced

CONTEXT: We are currently seeing a growing challenge to democracy in the United States. At the same time, executive orders have targeted nonprofits, intimidation has increased, and funders and other allies have softened their support of environmental justice.

ACTION: WE ACT, in collaboration with allies, will keep supporting the work of the Center for Non-Profit Viability, hosted by the Yale Center for Environmental Justice and which we were instrumental in launching in 2025, in a guidance capacity. The Center will provide legal support, capacity building, and technical assistance for environmental justice communities, strengthening their ability to engage in democratic processes, influence public policy, and participate meaningfully in environmental decision-making.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue its integral role in advancing the efforts to pass the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act (EJ4All), a crucial piece of legislation intended to address long-standing environmental justice issues. As congressional conversations around federal permitting persist, EJ4All will continue to be our North Star in terms of how Congress should change the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), strengthening this bedrock statute as opposed to weakening it. We will continue to organize to advance this legislation with allies, such as the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum, Equitable and Just National Climate Platform, and other environmental justice and related organizations to build momentum for EJ4All. In doing, so we will cultivate new environmental justice champions on Capitol Hill and other stakeholders. We will work with our allied offices in both the House and the Senate to continue advancing this essential bill in the 119th Congress, and carry on building support throughout both chambers. This momentum from working through this legislation will keep the support for environmental justice growing in this Congress.

A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act (EJ4All)

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Starting in 2018, late representatives Donald McEachin and Raúl Grijalva began working with environmental justice communities to draft the Environmental Justice for All Act, a comprehensive piece of legislation intended to be the nation's bedrock environmental law. 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. For years, environmental justice communities have advocated for this bill not just because of its provisions, but because the bill was written in a truly collaborative fashion, resulting in text that was written by the people, for the people.

Defending Federal Environmental Justice Policy and Funding Infrastructure

LEVEL: Federal

POLICY TYPE: Advocacy; Budget

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: Following the Biden-Harris administration's unprecedented advancements on environmental justice policy and funding, including the Justice40 Initiative, significant funding from the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA), and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the current administration has engaged in an all-out, and often illegal, attack on federal environmental justice policy, research, agency infrastructure, and funding. Environmental justice communities were just beginning to make progress in addressing decades of harm, and that hard-won progress must not be lost.

ACTION: WE ACT will continue to work through litigation, public communication, and advocacy to ensure that funds illegally blocked from the IJIA 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 to ensure the delivery of critical funding to communities of color and low-income, and to the realization of the potential of these once-in-a-generation investments. Additionally, we will continue to develop strong and data-driven messaging and communication strategies related to environmental justice policies, programs, and funding with the goal of defending and expanding support for environmental justice within Congress, federal agencies, and other institutions or organizations working on environmental issues.



Environmental Justice NYC (EJNYC)

LEVEL: City

POLICY TYPE: Law

STATUS: Ongoing

CONTEXT: In 2017, New York City passed Local Laws 60 and 64 to assess environmental equity issues and develop a plan to incorporate environmental justice into the fabric of City decision-making. This legislation centers on three main products: a report, a mapping tool, and a plan. The EJNYC Report and Mapping Tool, released in April 2024, is a comprehensive report on the environmental justice issues impacting our neighborhoods. It identifies policy opportunities the City will explore further and address in the EJNYC Plan.

ACTION: WE ACT has joined forces with New York City Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to work together on a citywide outreach effort to engage communities and get their input on developing a comprehensive plan – the EJNYC Plan – to address the environmental justice issues identified in the report. Engaging with the residents of New York's environmental justice communities, those who are most impacted by these issues, will be critical in developing effective, equitable solutions.

HEALTHY HOMES

Healthy Homes First Campaign

LEVEL: Federal; State

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 always the reality for people of color and low-income who often live in poorly maintained, older buildings and experience indoor health hazards such as lead, mold, and toxic air pollution from fossil fuel appliances. With the future of energy efficiency incentives uncertain, critical federal agency staff cuts, millions struggling to pay their energy bills, the real-time impacts of the climate crisis growing, and environmental protections at risk, putting healthy homes first is more urgent than ever. It is critical that those living in public and affordable housing, and residents of environmental justice communities in general, receive essential repairs, upgrades, and removal of indoor health hazards so they can live in healthier indoor environments, save money through improved energy efficiency, and reduce emissions that contribute to the climate crisis.

ACTIONS: Launched in 2025, WE ACT's Healthy Homes First is a national campaign amplifying lived experiences, driving policy reforms, and promoting whole-of-home upgrades to ensure that people of color and low-income are living in safer, healthier, and more energy efficient homes. 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 advocacy, capacity building tools, reports, and much more, this campaign 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 tackling the inequitable impacts of the climate crisis.

Lead Paint Right to Know Act (Pending)

LEVEL: State
POLICY TYPE: Legislation
STATUS: To Be Reintroduced

CONTEXT: Lead exposure is not only a problem in New York City but also statewide. In fact, New York State has more children with elevated blood lead levels than any other state in the U.S. And, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Buffalo - the birthplace of New York State Governor Kathy Hochul - has some of the highest rates of childhood lead poisoning in the nation.

ACTION: It is important to have statewide action to prevent childhood lead poisoning. As a co-leader of the Lead Free Kids New York coalition, WE ACT is addressing the issue through coalition building, policy development, and messaging. The coalition is focusing on passing a statewide law called the Lead Paint Right to Know Act, which will require homes built before 1970 - when lead paint was banned in the state - to be tested for lead and make the results of these tests available to the public. Additionally, the coalition is focused on ensuring that New York State Governor Kathy Hochul's new lead program, which she announced in the State's 2023 budget, is implemented successfully within the zip codes that have the highest rates of childhood lead poisoning.



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 for providing cooling. The current model that relies on tenants to purchase and run air conditioners during extreme heat events perpetuates heat stress and 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 95°F. On days within this temperature range, cooling centers are not available in New York City. Introduction 994-2024 has been introduced and garnered 21 co-sponsors in the New York City Council. It would require landlords to ensure all tenants have access to cooling devices capable of maintaining 78°F indoors when outdoor temperatures are at least 82°F. According to [2022 New York City Community Health Survey Data](#), New York City 90 percent of New York City households have air conditioning, but that percentage drops by 5-20 percent in several of the city's environmental justice communities.

ACTION: Since 2021, 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. 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, housing stability, and maintaining grid reliability.

OPEN & GREEN SPACE

Our Parks, Our Backyard: Improving Northern Manhattan 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 parks play in the public life and resiliency efforts of New York City neighborhoods. While other major cities across the United States 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 that includes our greenspaces, playgrounds, pools, beaches, waterfront, and athletic facilities. For those of us who live in Northern Manhattan and other environmental justice communities, local parks serve as our backyard and offer opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and respite. They also play a key role in helping adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat and flooding. Most of these spaces in environmental justice communities rely solely on public funding to keep them clean, safe and operational and do not have much, if any, private funding mechanisms. This causes our parks and green spaces to go into states of disrepair due to the lack of funding for maintenance.

ACTION: WE ACT for Environmental Justice has joined forces with the New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund to launch a campaign – Our Parks, Our Backyards – to engage Northern Manhattan residents on parks issues and the importance of parks funding. As part of this campaign, we will be hosting a series of events throughout Northern Manhattan to bring together community members, park advocates, and elected officials to discuss our parks; to identify problems, solutions, needs, and goals; and to engage in the budget campaign to get our parks adequately funded and maintained.



SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

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. NEPA requires the federal government to provide information to the public on the impacts of major government projects, such as building a highway or a power plant, and ensures that communities have a voice in what is built in their neighborhoods. However, NEPA has long been the target of misguided and misinformed attacks. The primary opposition to NEPA asserts that the statute delays the buildout of much-needed projects, including clean energy projects and the transmission lines that distribute energy from these projects to communities. Legislative proposals in Congress aim to limit rigorous environmental reviews, narrow the scope of federal requirements, weaken the ability for judicial review, and create additional obstacles for community engagement and participation in the name of speeding up project timelines.

ACTION: WE ACT is a leading advocate working to ensure communities continue to have a voice in the decision-making process of major federal permitting. Our goal is to achieve a restored and strengthened NEPA. It is critical that the permitting process protects public health and preserves community input, especially for 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 strengthen and pass bills such as the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act that are essential to ensuring that communities are centered, protected, and supported in the consideration of major federal projects. Simultaneously, we will push back against legislative attempts to weaken NEPA, like the SPEED Act, introduced in the 119th Congress.

Environmental Justice Siting Law (S.1317/A.1286)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Law

STATUS: Awaiting Phase II Proposed Rules

CONTEXT: The exposure to multiple environmental hazards simultaneously can compound adverse health impacts; WE ACT refers to this compounded harm as “cumulative impacts.” Communities of color and low-income are often exposed to multiple environmental hazards such as toxic chemicals in our drinking water, indoor air pollution, outdoor air pollution, loud noises, and dust, to name a few, due to multiple polluting facilities placed in their neighborhoods, all of which leads to adverse health issues that span generations.

ACTION: With allies, WE ACT helped pass and successfully encourage 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 (DEC) 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 “significantly increase” their emissions in the community in which they are located. The law went into effect on Dec 30th, 2024. WE ACT, communities across the state, and allied advocates are providing recommendations in the rulemaking process. DEC split the rulemaking process into multiple parts. Part II of the proposed rules have yet to be released.



East Harlem Climate and Community Master 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°F hotter 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, the neighborhood's residents of color and low-income 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 an updated version of 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.

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 further contribute to 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.



TOXIC-FREE PRODUCTS

Beauty Justice Act (S.2057A/A.2054A)

LEVEL: State

POLICY TYPE: Legislation

STATUS: Passed Senate; Assembly Advocacy

CONTEXT: There are many toxic chemicals such as formaldehyde, lead, benzene, and parabens in personal care products (e.g., soaps, synthetic braiding hair, cosmetics, and hair straighteners), and many of these chemical exposures 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 target 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 from a majority of personal care and beauty products sold in New York State, which would help protect the health of all New Yorkers - and the health of women of color, in particular.



WASTE & SANITATION

Organic Waste Diversion

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 a feedstock for the creation of biogas, specifically biomethane, which produces harmful emissions when used as an energy source. Furthermore, the City has significantly cut funding for community composting sites. 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 gasses, restores our 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 on educating Northern Manhattan residents on how to properly separate and dispose of household waste.

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