



January 28, 2026

**Catskill Mountainkeeper’s Written Testimony RE: Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2027
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing of the NYS Senate’s Finance Committee and
NYS Assembly’s Ways and Means Committee**

Catskill Mountainkeeper appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in regard to the Executive’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2027. We are focusing our comments solely on Governor Hochul’s proposed revisions to New York State’s Environmental Quality Review Act, Executive Budget (Article VII, TEDE Part R), in order to highlight our concerns about the obvious dangers and additional unintended consequences likely to be generated by these proposed revisions to SEQRA.

Catskill Mountainkeeper is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located in Livingston Manor in Sullivan County, New York, with a satellite office near Woodstock in Ulster County, New York. Mountainkeeper is nationally recognized as a powerful advocate for the Catskill region and works with a large network of concerned citizens and strategic partners to protect and promote our region’s extraordinary natural heritage, while promoting smart development that supports local communities.

Affordable housing must be safe housing for those who live in it and those who live around it. New York’s SEQRA is designed to enable communities to evaluate multiple factors and achieve a balance between proposed development and associated environmental and health burdens. Eliminating SEQRA’s protections from broad categories of projects — simply in the name of increasing the number of housing units constructed — is dangerous and ill-conceived. “Let Them Build” is a slogan designed to marginalize safeguards that are as necessary for affordable housing as any other project and does nothing to insure that all projects comply with local zoning, meet state health regulations, and have no significant impacts to the environment.

Catskill Mountainkeeper urges the Legislature to work to balance New York’s urgent need for housing with our equally critical need to protect human health, clean water, and open space. SEQRA serves as an important framework that helps decision-makers identify and address potential risks to air, water, and communities before irreversible harm occurs. Any proposed revisions to SEQRA must be tailored to address the housing crisis without creating new, long-term problems.

Protecting our natural environment strengthens local economies, enhances community resilience, and better prepares the state for the impacts of climate change. SEQRA reform is not necessary in order to encourage development in existing communities and on previously developed land: those factors can lead to expedited review under SEQRA as it currently exists. Moreover, the Executive’s proposed re-definition of “previously developed” land is so broad that it risks encompassing land that currently serves vital functions, such as carbon sequestration, habitat preservation, water filtration, and flood mitigation. Defining land as previously disturbed based on activity occurring a mere two years prior is insufficient and should be reconsidered and extended, if included at all. The legislature must also exercise care and

caution around protecting agricultural lands. These lands are carbon sinks, provide wildlife habitat and increase biodiversity, absorb rainwater and recharge aquifers, increase resilience to floods and wildfires, and grow our food. Once farmland is developed, it can rarely go back to agricultural use. The proposed revisions lack clarity about which lands would qualify as agricultural or not and what standards would be used to determine exemption eligibility. At a time when farmland is increasingly threatened, New York should not be incentivizing its conversion into subdivisions. Development on agricultural land should not be exempt from SEQRA review. The legislature should make sure that SEQRA is allowed to do its work.

Please contact Ramsay Adams (ramsay@catskillmountainkeeper.org), Executive Director, with questions or for further details.