

January 27, 2026

Joint Legislative Public Hearing
FY2027 Executive Budget Proposal
Environmental Conservation, January 28, 2026
Legislative Office Building
181 State Street, Albany, NY 12247

Dear Honorable Senators and Members of the Assembly,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my opinion as an individual on the FY2027 Executive Budget.

I would like to address three points:

1. The New York State (NYS) Legislature should resist efforts to roll back existing law, including SEQRA, climate law and environmental regulations in the name of affordability.
2. NYS must prioritize the build-out of renewable energy to meet reliability and affordability goals, rather than nuclear energy.
3. NYS should make sure money is available to fix existing water infrastructure problems before dedicating funds to new water infrastructure that can promote sprawl yet not help achieve affordable housing targets which are needed.

1. The NYS Legislature should resist efforts to roll back existing law, including SEQRA, climate law, and environmental regulations in the name of affordability.

In Governor Hochul's FY2027 Executive Budget, Part R of the TED, she proposes a number of changes to New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), with the expressed aim of producing more affordable housing units. She has also delayed meeting the timeline of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) to put regulations in place to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which exacerbate climate change. She claims to have held back in the name of affordability, and I am concerned that in the effort to reduce government expenditures in the wake of devastating federal funding cuts, she will advocate for ignoring additional environmental regulations that she deems too expensive.

The irony is that these actions by the governor won't necessarily increase affordability for New Yorkers and in some cases will end up costing us substantially more.

For example, SEQRA was passed in 1975 to allow for environmental review of certain categories of projects that may cause negative impacts on communities. There may be a few changes to SEQRA that might help reduce red tape and expedite projects without harming the environment, but the suggestions outlined in the Executive Budget are too broad and will basically allow for abuse by developers who are more interested in cost cutting than in the long term impacts of their projects on the health of residents and the viability of ecosystems. Health care costs and the huge expense of damage from climate change-related weather may end up costing communities well more than any affordability savings from streamlining SEQRA to the extent in Part R. Especially in the wake of current attempts to

roll back environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act, we need New York to hold the line on rollbacks to laws which are meant to protect our residents.

There is indeed a lack of affordable housing, but that is partly because existing housing is tied up by land speculation, high rents and pleasure uses such as AirBnBs. Gutting SEQRA as per Part R will not encourage new affordable housing, just allow more projects to sail through without regard to environmental impacts. Instead of enacting Part R, the legislature should look at the provisions of **S.3492A (May)/A.6283A (Kelles)**, the “Sustainable Affordable Housing and Sprawl Prevention Act” which provides for changes to SEQRA for affordable and workforce housing that get rid of the red tape while preventing abuses that could arise under Part R. And if the Legislature wants to fix SEQRA, it should consider changes to make it easier for citizens to qualify for standing in lawsuits to enforce SEQRA, such as **S.3206 (Kavanagh)**.

Similarly, the governor’s refusal to put forth regulations in a timely way as required by CLCPA condemns New Yorkers to bear more climate change impacts. Besides storm damage, climate change causes extreme heat impacts, especially on vulnerable populations, and drives up costs of food and other necessities. The governor did have a Cap and Invest program ready that would have cut greenhouse gas emissions while subsidizing the energy bills of low and middle income New Yorkers, so delaying this program actually makes energy costs *less* affordable. And delaying the implementation of the “All Electric Buildings Act” allows the gas industry to continue to expand expensive gas infrastructure on the backs of ratepayers, hardly the way to make energy more affordable.

Finally, anytime protective regulations are rolled back, it is a gift to polluters and those who would profit at public expense. Given the extent this is happening at the federal level, it is even more essential that New York stand firm against rollbacks to CLCPA, “All Electric Buildings Act” and environmental regulations.

2. NYS must prioritize the build-out of renewable energy to meet reliability and affordability goals, rather than nuclear energy.

In her State of the State address, Governor Hochul touted her plans to build advanced nuclear power as a solution to New York’s energy and affordability crises. While no mention of nuclear subsidies appears in the Executive Budget, it is possible she will include these in her 30 day amendments, and it is important for the Legislature to push back against plans like this. Nuclear power is not a solution to the high cost of energy nor can it be built quickly enough to be a way to cut down on greenhouse gas-producing fossil fuel generating plants. The affordable, practical solution is to quickly build renewable energy generation, including solar and wind with battery storage backup, for times when the sun is not shining or the wind is not blowing.

The cost of wind and solar generation has come down.¹ Building renewable energy projects costs approximately 1/3 that of constructing enough nuclear power to get the same solar nameplate capacity. After that, the wind and sun are free, so the costs of operation are much lower than nuclear, and these renewable energy sources don’t leave radioactive waste around for thousands of years. It is also much quicker to build wind and solar, and in combination with battery storage, they provide safe, reliable energy that is much more affordable for ratepayers and society.

1 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-energy-nuclearpower-idUSKBN1W909J/>,
<https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/Power-Play-The-Economics-Of-Nuclear-Vs-Renewables>

In addition to the high cost of nuclear power, there is a quality of life aspect that is important for the Legislature to consider. I have lived within 12 miles of the Indian Point nuclear power plant for my entire life, and have seen that as it aged, the nuclear facility had longer and more frequent periods of being offline because of a number of problems, so its reliability was not guaranteed. Most people don't want to live near a nuclear plant, so property values are lower. There has been a cluster of thyroid cancer in Rockland County (which affected a member of my family) downwind of the facility, and a plume of tritium in the Hudson River for years comes from leaks into groundwater below the plant. And even though the facility is now shut down, in the decommissioning process the company doing the demolition won a lawsuit that vacated a New York State law to prevent radioactive water from being dumped into the Hudson from the spent fuel pools on the basis that it was preempted by federal law.²

The demolition company is now proposing to build small modular nuclear reactors on the site. Given the transmission interconnections at the site, it would make sense to build some solar with battery storage here, but it is not in the interests of the community to subject us further to the dangers and leftover radioactive waste of another nuclear plant. New York must put the health of its residents and its environment first.

3. NYS should make sure money is available to fix existing water infrastructure problems before dedicating funds to new water infrastructure that can promote sprawl yet not help achieve affordable housing targets which are needed.

As a resident of a NYS community which has been impacted by PFAS contamination in our drinking water, I agree with the governor's proposal to spend another \$500 million for FY2027 to upgrade wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, especially replacement of lead drinking water pipes.

However, while the additional \$250 million proposed for "clean water infrastructure" would be welcome to address the many existing needs, it should *not* be spent on water infrastructure for new housing developments. That is akin to allowing gas utilities to place the cost of connecting customers to new gas lines on the ratepayers through the "100 foot rule," which was finally repealed in 2025. The way the proposal is set up, this would amount to essentially a \$250 million subsidy to developers, and there are no guardrails to make sure the subsidy would require construction of affordable housing.

In addition, living in a county where we get all our water from within our borders, I realize the importance of not building new housing before making sure there is enough water to supply it. New housing proposals, especially big complexes, should have to show the supply is adequate.

Without guardrails, the additional clean water funding will likely promote sprawl but not result in new affordable housing.

In conclusion, I urge the Legislature to hold the line on rollbacks to SEQRA, CLCPA, and other environmental regulations, to prioritize renewable energy projects instead of nuclear, and to make sure clean water funding goes to PFAS cleanup and needed drinking water and sewer infrastructure repair and upgrades rather than promoting new development and sprawl, especially when there are no guardrails to limit building to affordable housing only.

² <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/new-york-law-curbing-radioactive-indian-point-discharges-voided-by-us-judge-2025-09-24/>

I cannot emphasize too strongly the principle that protecting resources and the environment is cheaper than cleanup and healthcare costs after contamination and loss of our clean air, clean water and open spaces. The Legislature should examine with a skeptical eye any claim of affordability as a justification for rolling back regulations and make sure our budget solutions actually provide relief for people who need it most while maintaining hard-won protections for our environment. New York needs to continue being an environmental leader, especially now. The stakes couldn't be higher.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Gale Pisha
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