



New York State Council Of Churches

Testimony

Joint Budget Hearings on Environmental Conservation

Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee

January 28, 2026

The New York State Council of Churches is comprised of over 7,500 congregations in nine Protestant denominations across the state. The members of those congregations, as well as people of many other faith traditions, share the conviction that we are called to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. That means taking concrete, practical steps to care for God's creation and to work for the well-being of our neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable.

As we strive to live out that ethic in society, part of the church's witness is to participate in the public dialogue about how as a society we distribute resources, promote the common good, address the needs of the most vulnerable among us, assure and advance justice, and care for and help restore God's creation. We are grateful that you have welcomed the voice of the faith community to be a part of this public dialogue.

The climate crisis presents one of the greatest threats to humanity and indeed, all of creation. A failure to address this crisis is a failure to love God and to love our neighbors.

We know that carbon dioxide levels must remain at 350 parts per million to maintain a stable climate and avoid catastrophic warming. Before the industrial revolution and the extensive use of fossil fuels the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was about 280 parts per million (ppm). When President Eisenhower was inaugurated on January 20, 1953, CO₂ levels were at 310 to 312 ppm. Forty years ago when the space shuttle Challenger exploded on January 28, 1986, CO₂ levels were at 347–348 parts per million. When the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act was signed into law on July 18, 2019, setting a goal of a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (from 1990 levels), CO₂ levels had risen to 412-413 ppm. Yesterday, January 27, 2026, carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere measured at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii, were at 428.5 ppm. If this trend continues human civilization as we know it will not.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined that we have until 2030 to dramatically reduce fossil fuel consumption if we are to avoid a climate catastrophe. “Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future,” they reported. Every year that passes without a drastic reduction in global emissions makes catastrophe more certain.

What is at stake touches the very heart of our faith. A failure to address the climate crisis is a failure to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is the “least of these among us” —the poor, the marginalized, communities of color, our children and grandchildren, and many of our fellow creatures — who will suffer the gravest effects of climate chaos.

Seeking justice for the marginalized and caring for the earth are inextricably bound together. “We are faced not with two separate crises,” wrote Pope Francis, “one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (*Laudato Si*, 139).

The urgency of the climate crisis demands that do as much as we can, as rapidly as we can, and in every way we can to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition as rapidly as possible to renewable energy systems, while at the same time ensuring that poor and marginalized communities are not left behind. With the federal government having largely abandoned its responsibility in addressing the climate crisis, it is imperative that the State take decisive action.

One of the most effective, affordable and fastest ways of both reducing fossil fuel emissions and meeting New York’s growing energy needs is to increase the state’s solar energy capacity. The New York State Council of Churches supports legislation which would expedite the transition to solar energy. One way to do that is to streamline the permitting process and ease connection to the grid. These regulations are in the hands of cities and states—not the federal government. In October 2025, Permit Power—a nonprofit focused on addressing this problem—published [a report](#) that found that streamlined solar permitting nationwide could deliver \$1,600 in annual electricity cost savings for the average family, \$1.2 trillion in cost savings for the whole country over the next 25 years, and 18.2 million more rooftop solar installations by 2040.

The **ACCELERATE SOLAR FOR AFFORDABLE POWER (ASAP) ACT (A8758 Barrett / S6570 Harckham)** raises New York’s distributed solar capacity (residential, commercial, and community solar) capacity goal to 20 gigawatts by 2035; and directs the Public Service Commission to enact reforms to the utility interconnection process to ensure new distributed energy resources can be integrated more quickly and cost-effectively. With the end of federal clean energy support programs and rising utility costs, state leadership is necessary to ensure continued access to affordable and reliable energy for all New Yorkers. The ASAP Act is projected to result in \$50 billion in direct utility bill savings (an average electricity savings of \$87 annually for upstate residential customers and \$46 annually for downstate residential customers) and would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 145 million metric tons.

The SOLAR UP NOW NEW YORK ACT (SUNNY) ACT (A9111 Gallagher / S8512 Krueger) exempts small-scale balcony or plug-in solar from interconnection and net metering requirements and prohibits utilities from requiring customers to obtain approval for using such a device or paying any related fee.

We also urge the enactment of the **PACKAGING REDUCTION AND RECYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE ACT (A1749/S1464)**. An average of 6.8 million tons of packaging waste is produced each year in New York State, constituting 40% of the total waste stream. Unlike aluminum, paper, and glass which are recycled more successfully, only about 5% of U.S. plastic waste is properly recycled. Moreover, most plastics are recycled only once or twice before being disposed of in landfills or incinerators. Much of today's recycling is merely postponing final disposal, not preventing waste. And because single-use plastic is produced from fossil fuels, extracting and creating these plastics emits vast amounts of greenhouse gases. Today, about 4-8% of annual global oil consumption is associated with plastics, according to the World Economic Forum. If this reliance on plastics persists, plastics will account for 20% of oil consumption by 2050. Some [98 per cent of single-use plastic produced](#) today is made of petrochemicals. The extraction and transport of those fossil fuels, and the manufacturing and disposal of plastics, all create carbon emissions that are responsible for global warming.

The only way to curb these carbon emissions and mitigate plastic pollution is to significantly reduce the manufacture and use of plastics.

The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act would require companies to:

- Reduce their packaging by 30% in 12 years.
- Make much of the remaining packaging truly reusable or recyclable.
- Ban the most toxic chemicals currently used in packaging.
- Prohibit incineration and so-called "chemical recycling" from counting as recycling.
- Establish a modest fee on packaging paid by product producers, with new revenue going to local taxpayers.

A recent study from Beyond Plastics showed that New Yorkers would save \$1.3 billion in just one decade after the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act becomes law, all the while addressing a growing threat to public health and the environment.

Pass the **STOP CLIMATE POLLUTER HANDOUTS ACT (S3606 Krueger/A3675 Simon)**

Currently, New York State provides approximately \$1.8 billion in tax exemptions annually to the fossil fuel industry. The Stop Climate Polluter Handouts Act would eliminate 20% (or \$350 million) of those tax breaks, sending a clear signal that the state will no longer subsidize industries and practices that are continuing to cause harm by contributing to the climate crisis. Eliminating these subsidies will also lower the burden on taxpayers, help close the budget gap and move us towards our climate goals. The Act preserves tax breaks that benefit the public, so the average lower and middle income New Yorker will not be significantly impacted, and job losses are not expected. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we must stop relying on fossil fuels; a key step is to stop subsidizing the industries that produce them.

Enact the **RENEWABLE CAPITOL ACT (A3466 Romero/ S4842 Fahy)**

The Renewable Capitol Act requires the Office of General Services (OGS) and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to ensure that the state-owned buildings that run on the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant transition to renewable energy systems within three years. Converting the state Capitol to 100% clean renewable energy is a critical environmental and racial justice issue. The communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill have suffered for decades as a result of pollution caused by burning fuels (at various times coal, oil, gas, and garbage) used to power the Capitol Complex. We urge the legislature to include the Renewable Capitol Act in the budget and to adhere to the three-year timeline for converting the Empire State Plaza complex to renewable energy systems.

The urgency of the climate crisis demands that we act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition as rapidly as possible to renewable energy systems. We cannot afford further delay. With the federal government retreating from its responsibility in addressing the crisis, it is imperative that New York State take bold and decisive action now.

Sincerely,

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