



UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS
Testimony on the Climate and
Community Investment Act (CCIA)

Presented To:
Senator Todd Kaminsky, Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation
and
Senator Kevin Parker, Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Energy

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Chairperson Kaminsky, Chairperson Parker, distinguished members of the Senate standing committees on Environmental Conservation and Energy and Telecommunications, thank you for inviting United University Professions (UUP) to testify about the Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA).

My name is Dr. Frederick E. Kowal, and I am the president of UUP. It is my honor to represent more than 37,000 academic and professional faculty at SUNY. Our members live and work in communities across the state of New York, serving hundreds of thousands of students and patients at 29 SUNY comprehensive, technical, specialized and university centers, SUNY academic medical centers and state-operated public teaching hospitals, and System Administration.

I want to take a moment to thank Senator Parker for sponsoring Senate Bill S4264A, which, if approved, would enact the CCIA, a sweeping initiative which would aid disadvantaged communities adversely affected by climate change and expand and grow clean and renewable energy sources.

Thank you also to the co-sponsors of the bill: senators Alessandra Biaggi; Jabari Brisport; Leroy Comrie; Michelle Hinchey; Robert Jackson; Rachel May; Jessica Ramos; Elijah Reichlin-Melnick; and James Sanders.

UUP strongly supports approval of the CCIA, and we urge the Legislature to embrace and pass this important initiative and for the governor to sign it into law.

This is a bold, progressive proposal that would help tens of thousands of people in communities disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, create as many as 150,000 good-paying green jobs and showcase New York state as a leader in combating climate change and achieving climate justice.

It would penalize large-scale corporate polluters, which would pay a fee (\$55 per ton of greenhouse gas emissions, increasing each year) for carbon emissions. The polluters' fee would drive the initiatives in the CCIA; it is estimated that the penalties paid by polluters will raise around \$15 billion per year over the first 10 years of the plan.

If approved, the CCIA would help make our air and water cleaner. It would improve the health of many New Yorkers and allow the state to take a huge leap forward toward a sustainable future.

UUP: Strong for the environment

UUP has long advocated for the environment. Our union believes strongly in climate justice and in combatting climate change. I am on the National Wildlife Federation's board of directors. Our 2021-22 legislative agenda, New York HEALS (Healthcare, Education, Access, Leadership, Sustainability) has an entire section dedicated to sustainability initiatives.

Specifically, we are calling for:

- Reducing SUNY's carbon footprint by 25 percent in 2021 by the installation of solar, wind and geothermal projects and implementing broad renewable energy options for campuses;
- Expanding green industry degrees and training/retraining courses at SUNY;
- Establishing SUNY as a world leader in climate crisis research and mitigation by increasing funding to SUNY—and especially to the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, which is uniquely positioned to study the impacts on environmental injustice on communities across New York; and
- Creating a pilot program of energy microgrids and battery storage sites at SUNY campuses, which would create and store clean energy to be used by the campuses and campus communities.

We advocated for and applauded the approval of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), which set legally binding targets for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing renewable energy production (including offshore wind, solar and energy storage) and carbon reduction through energy efficiency and electrification.

The CLCPA requires the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the state's Public Service Commission to enact rules and regulations for compliance with the new requirements. Under the law, communities excessively affected by climate change will receive at least 35 percent of the overall benefits from the state's climate programs.

A firm foundation

Approval of the CCIA is the next logical step for New York after the CLCPA, a measure touted by The New York Times as "one of the world's most ambitious climate plans" when Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed it into law in 2019. The CCIA builds on the solid foundation established by the CLCPA.

The CCIA will provide necessary funding to ensure that crucial mandates outlined in the CLCPA—such as achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, 100 percent zero-emission electricity by 2040 and 70 percent of renewable energy generation in the state by 2030—are met.

Aiding communities in need

It also achieves climate justice by using the polluters' penalty to benefit frontline environmentally affected communities—including many Black and brown neighborhoods used for years as toxic dumping grounds by corporate polluters.

It is imperative that we invest in these communities adversely affected by the climate crisis, which have dealt with decades of exposure to harmful pollutants and adverse climate impacts—such as rising sea levels, flooding, superstorms, drought and extreme temperatures. It is fair and it is just to do so.

A full third of the revenue raised by the CCIA will go to community organizations in areas most affected by climate change—and most in need of climate justice. The funds will be used to create renewable energy programs in these areas, such as community-owned solar generation and investing in infrastructure that would enable schools, businesses, apartments and homes able to connect to these new power sources.

Good green jobs

The CCIA also creates jobs—lots of green jobs that will pay well and will adhere to “gold-standard” labor provisions that would pay prevailing wages, adhere to apprenticeship requirements, best-value procurement, and community benefits agreements.

According to NY Renews, a statewide coalition of labor unions, community groups, environmental organizations, faith communities and environmental justice advocates, the CCIA is expected to create and sustain more than 150,000 quality green jobs over the next 10 years. UUP is a longstanding member of NY Renews, which was instrumental in passage of the CLCPA.

UUP also supports a CCIA provision that would look first to people in frontline communities, women in non-traditional trades, people coming off unemployment, and formerly incarcerated New Yorkers to fill new jobs created by the CCIA. Schools, childcare centers, and public transportation in disproportionately affected communities would be prioritized for polluter-fee funding—which cannot be spent on police or prisons.

Renewable energy: building the infrastructure

The only way to create a sustainable future for New York is to invest in renewable energy sources. The CCIA provides for this by allotting 30 percent of the revenue generated in polluters’ fees for large-scale investments in offshore wind, solar arrays, power grid stability and electric vehicles. Improvements to public transportation and public housing would also benefit from the fines.

Low and moderate-income families across the state will also benefit by passage of the CCIA; 60 percent of the lowest-earning families will receive energy rebates and assistance to weatherize their homes and make them more energy efficient. The rebates will provide a buffer to these families in case fossil fuel companies raise rates due to CCIA penalties.

Conclusion

Yes, the CCIA is a bold, ambitious plan, but it’s one that the times demand.

At last, the beginning of the end of the coronavirus pandemic has begun. Vaccines are being widely distributed and thousands of New Yorkers are being vaccinated each day. The former president, a climate change denier who spent much of the past four years softening and suffocating environmental protections, has been voted out.

The time is now to put this progressive plan in place. The climate crisis is real. There is no time to waste to respond to it. We must act swiftly to protect and preserve our planet and to achieve climate justice for those most affected by decades of pollution in their neighborhoods and communities.

Everyone deserves to breathe clean air and drink clean water. Major polluters who make billions while pumping out toxic emissions must pay for their actions.

New York led the nation—and the world—when it passed the CLCPA in 2019. Now it's time to take the next step and approve the CCIA, a bill that will help put into place many of the measures called for in the CLCPA.

UUP stands ready to do all it can to advance this transformative bill.