

Victoria Whalen

Our Climate NY Fellow

NY Renews Digital Media Fellow

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My name is Victoria Whalen, I am a senior at Marymount Manhattan College and plan on attending law school in the fall. I am testifying for the Climate and Community Investment Act on behalf of Our Climate and NY Renews. Before I begin, I would like to preface that my testimony is shrouded in the underlying theme that climate justice is racial justice.

We are in unprecedented times, with a pandemic that is rampaging through our communities and not only taking claim of our lives, but also taking the lives of our friends and families. We are battling a virus that does not see age, gender, or race, and yet, studies have proven that BIPOC (Black, brown, and indigenous) communities are the ones most impacted by Covid-19. These same communities bear the brunt force of climate change impacts and it is these same communities that are the first to suffer from the damages done by corporate polluters. I am currently researching the health impacts of air pollution and how it correlates with the racial statistics of the five different boroughs. My studies have shown that there is a positive correlation of over .4 that relates to fine particulate matter, greenhouse gases, and other harmful air pollutants in communities that have a higher population of Black/brown inhabitants. A correlation value above .2 is incredibly significant as it shows a strong relationship between Black/brown communities and said air pollutants. Corporate polluters are using BIPOC land to dump toxic air pollutants, like the fine particulate matter, which have long-lasting and detrimental effects. We have already seen this play out during the pandemic. According to the

CDC, Black/Brown people are dying from Covid-19 at a higher rate of over 2 times the rate of white people because of their previous lung diseases and asthma diagnosis that has been caused by environmental racism and harm.

The Climate and Community Investment Act addresses these systemic racial inequalities by reducing pollution from corporate villains through a corporate polluter fee and addressing the public health disparities that are rooted in our society. By moving away from a reliance on fossil fuels towards one of renewable energy, we are reducing detrimental health effects caused by air pollution and providing a safer and cleaner future for all of New York State . Fossil fuel villains have used and abused our land without any consequences, and their climate transgressions can no longer be ignored. These polluters must pay for the damages they have caused. Our communities are not expendable, and neither is our planet. New York State must enact a polluter penalty, which through the CCIA, directly targets corporations who are importing fossil fuels through pipelines, trucks, and other large depots. We can no longer afford to bail out BP, Exxon, or utilities like National Grid. If they can spend millions of dollars lobbying to keep their pockets full, they can spend the same amount of money to ensure our planet is protected and our families are getting the clean air and water they deserve. Climate justice is racial justice. The time is now to hold polluters accountable in order to ensure a cleaner future for all of New York State and for generations to come.