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Electrifying State-Owned Buildings in Albany Would Further State's Climate Goals and Mitigate Harms to Downtown Albany Neighborhoods

120 Community and Labor Organizations Call on Governor to Make State Capitol, Empire State Plaza 100% Renewable

Albany – One hundred twenty organizations statewide, including roughly 25 Albany groups and elected officials, wrote Governor Hochul today to urge her to include legislation in her upcoming state budget championed by the Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy (SHARE) to make the Capitol and other state buildings in downtown Albany run on renewable energy. The groups said this action would be consistent with the state's climate goals and alleviate long term harms to the nearby environmental justice communities.

The legislation, the Renewable Capitol Act (S2689/A5633), sponsored by Albany legislators Pat Fahy in the Assembly and Neil Breslin in the Senate, would shut down the Sheridan Hollow Steam Plant (SASP) within three years, replacing the existing fracked gas facility with a system like geothermal or air source heat pumps that does not result in greenhouse gas emissions.

“Again and again, Governor Hochul has proclaimed her commitment to addressing climate change and environmental justice. Yet she has thus far failed to pick the low hanging fruit and establish a plan to stop using fracked gas to heat and cool the State Capitol and Empire State Plaza, where she and thousands of other state employees work every day,” said **Mert Simpson, co-chair of SHARE and an Albany County legislator whose district includes the SASP**. “Oklahoma, Michigan and Colorado heat their state capitol buildings with geothermal energy – New York should join them. Engineers and other experts advising SHARE all agree that converting the Capitol complex to renewables is feasible. The disproportionately Black and Brown residents of my community have every right to expect that we should not continue to be harmed by the state's operations in our neighborhood.”

“Decarbonizing the Capitol complex is ... a critical environmental justice issue,” **the organizational letter to Hochul** explained. “For more than a century, the low-income Sheridan Hollow community of color has been subjected to pollution in order to power the Capitol complex. Coal, oil, gas, and even garbage have all been burned at ... SASP ... and the ANSWERS building, with negative health impacts for local residents such as asthma and cancer.”

The 2023-24 state budget contained language providing for \$30 million for studies on the feasibility of decarbonizing the 15 top emitting state facilities, but the legislation has no mandate to make any of the facilities fossil free once the studies are completed. SASP

is located in the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood, less than a mile from the State Capitol. The state is completing a two-year effort to develop an energy master plan for the Empire State Plaza, enabling the state to move faster on decarbonizing the Capitol complex faster than the other top emitting state facilities.

“The Scoping Plan – the state’s roadmap to achieving the climate targets in the state Climate Act – says that state agencies should prioritize efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in disadvantaged communities like Arbor Hill, where I live,” said **Rosemary Rivera, Executive Director of Citizen Action of New York**. “And the state is encouraging homeowners and businesses to stop using fossil fuels. We need Governor Hochul to make good on the state’s commitments and to demonstrate to New Yorkers and other states how to move towards a different economy that promotes clean energy and stops dumping on communities of color.” SASP pollutes both the Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill neighborhoods in Albany.

“The State Capitol should be a beacon showing the rest of the state - and nation - the way to a clean energy future. The United Nations has continually warned that we are out of time to end the use of fossil fuels. The Renewable Capitol Act is not only a critical climate and environmental justice proposal but will provide tens of thousands of living wage jobs for local residents,” added **Mark Dunlea, coordinator of PAUSE**.

“Climate Justice and Environmental Justice is a Civil Rights issue,” says **Arlene Way, Executive Director of Arbor Hill Development Corporation, and an Arbor Hill resident**. “Communities of color and marginalized communities are historically and disproportionately affected by the harmful effects of greenhouse emissions. My neighborhood has been specifically affected and there is data to support that claim. We fully support the Renewable Capitol Act.”

“The Green Sanctuary Team of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany strongly supports the Renewable Capitol Act, both for bringing environmental justice to the local community and for putting the state on a better track towards its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals,” said **Chuck Manning, Chair of the Green Sanctuary Team**.

“The Sheridan Hollow neighborhood has been designated by the Climate Justice Working Group as a Disadvantaged Community and by the State as a Brownfield Opportunity Area. The continued burning of fracked gas at the state-owned Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant is inconsistent with the environmental justice and greenhouse gas reduction mandates of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and the Department of Environmental Conservation’s Environmental Justice Policy 29. Including the Renewable Capitol Act in the Executive Budget would demonstrate Governor Hochul’s commitment to those policies while making State operations in Albany a showcase for clean energy technologies,” said **Laura Faulk of the Climate Reality Project: Capital Region, NY Chapter**.

Among the Albany community and advocacy organizations that signed the letter in addition to SHARE were the Arbor Hill Development Corporation, the Albany NAACP, Save the Pine Bush, Citizen Action of New York, PAUSE (People of Albany United to

Save Energy), the South End Improvement Corporation, and Solarize Albany. Statewide organizations signing onto the letter included the Alliance for a Green Economy, Environmental Advocates, the Green Education and Legal Fund, NY Renews, New Yorkers for Clean Power, Rivers and Mountains Greenfaith, the Trinity Alliance of the Capital Region, the South End Improvement Corporation and NYPIRG.

The letter, including the list of signers, is posted [here](#):