



A Shared Vision

for Pennsylvania's Environment and Communities



July 2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	INTRODUCTION	
4	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
10	GUARANTEEING OUR RIGHT TO CLEAN AIR AND A HEALTHY CLIMATE	
	The State of Climate Change in Pennsylvania	10
	Health Impacts of Air Quality Concerns	10
	Policy Solutions	11
	Profile: Charles Reeves (Philadelphia County)	11
12	SAFEGUARDING OUR RIGHT TO PURE WATER	
	Threats to Drinking Water	12
	Forever Chemicals	12
	Lead	12
	Plastics	12
	Conservation and Recreation	13
	Growing Greener III	13
	Profile: Ivy Westmoreland (Allegheny County)	13
	Clean Streams Fund	14
	Policy Solutions	14
16	INVEST IN AN ENERGY POLICY THAT SUPPORTS PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES	
	Profile: Veronica Coptis (Greene County)	17
	Policy Solutions	18
19	HOUSING AND LAND USE THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL PENNSYLVANIANS	
	Updating Pennsylvania's Aging Housing Stock	19
	Green Spaces	19
	Profile: Rafael Diaz (Lancaster County)	20
	Climate Resilient Infrastructure	20
	The Importance of Public Transportation	21
	Policy Solutions	21
22	ENSURING LABOR RIGHTS IN THE GREEN ECONOMY	
	Policy Solutions	22
	Profile: Helen Burke (Erie County)	23
24	PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY MEANS PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT	
	Policy Solutions	25
	Profile: John Santana (Lehigh County)	25
26	QUALITY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS	
	Policy Solutions	27
	Profile: Rashida Lovely (Lackawanna County)	27
28	APPENDIX: EXPERT LIST	
Back Cover	COALITION PARTNERS	

INTRODUCTION

“The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment.”

This year, Pennsylvania voters will choose our next Governor and vote in elections for our entire state House and half of our state Senate. Each election marks a renewed opportunity for Pennsylvanians to collectively determine the direction of our Commonwealth in the years ahead. We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully present this document, *A Shared Vision for Pennsylvania's Environment and Communities*, to educate and guide candidates for office this year – and future elected officials – on the important environmental issues facing Pennsylvania.

First and foremost, we recognize that this election is a critical time to address the issues facing Pennsylvania's frontline and environmental justice communities that have been disproportionately impacted by polluting industries, inequitable policy, and inadequate regulatory decisions for far too long. Not only must these inequities stop, but trust with these communities must be rebuilt as a first step to improving their health, well-being, environment and economies.

Pennsylvania faces myriad pressing environmental issues. The science of the climate crisis, and its impacts on the lives of Pennsylvanians, compels urgent and bold action. Our waterways remain one of our most precious resources, yet they face a multitude of challenges from excess nitrogen, to pollution from plastics, to acid mine drainage. Aging homes throughout the state contain damaging lead, asbestos, and other environmental toxins that damage the health of the most vulnerable. Our democracy is under threat and without a healthy and vibrant democracy, we cannot have a healthy environment. And we recognize that there are historic opportunities to reimagine how we can design our schools, workplaces, and homes in ways that are more sustainable and equitable.



This year's Shared Vision examines a suite of intersectional issues that reflect the many dimensions of environmental injustice. Building on and with appreciation to the People's Plan for Climate Justice, we have organized our platform around the following issues: Air, Water; Energy, Housing and Land Use, Labor, Democracy, and Education. We are making recommendations in each of these areas for those of you running for office this year to consider in your campaigns. And if you are elected, we are asking you to contemplate our vision during your transition, to keep it in mind as you build your leadership teams, and above all, to act on it during your tenure in office.

We seek leaders who find common ground with this agenda. We seek leaders that are courageous enough to declare that Pennsylvania – as one of only two states nationwide with a constitutional guarantee of environmental rights – has a powerful but underutilized tool at our disposal to address environmental disparities and to protect the incredible natural heritage of our state. We seek leaders that recognize that we must do better.

If elected, you will have a constitutional responsibility to deploy this tool and to defend these environmental rights as described in Article 1 § 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution: *The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.*

At this important time for our Commonwealth, we seek your leadership on these issues, and our organizations stand ready to support policies, programs and investments that will advance them.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pennsylvanians are guaranteed a constitutional right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Therefore, every state level elected official must take under consideration environmental protections in all aspects of their policymaking.

To help assist with this mandate, environmental, conservation, and environmental justice organizations throughout the Commonwealth have come together to identify the most pressing environmental problems and solutions in our Shared Vision for Pennsylvania's Environment and Communities. We have divided this document into several priority environmental focus areas, each of which present their own unique challenges while remaining intrinsically intertwined:

AIR

Pennsylvania experiences high levels of air pollution, which negatively impacts our health and climate. However, we have the tools we need to deal with these issues: investing in renewable energy, funding for increased air quality monitoring, and prioritizing the needs of frontline and environmental justice communities.

Policy Solutions

- Require facilities seeking permits within EJ communities to prepare a cumulative environmental impact assessment and health risk assessment that includes any potential negative impacts they may have on the surrounding area. The DEP should then be empowered to deny a permit application based on the results of the cumulative impacts.
- Provide funding for increased air quality monitoring, which includes community monitoring and facility site monitoring.
- Oppose all new subsidies for petrochemical facilities in Pennsylvania. Support increased, science-backed setback requirements (protective buffers) between fracking, compressor stations, and processing plants and homes, schools, and waterbodies.
- No permit renewals for facilities with outstanding violations.
- Endorse policies aimed at equitable electrification of public transit, school buses, heavy duty truck traffic, as well as personal cars and infrastructure development
- Establish new setback requirements between certain non-public utility gas and natural gas liquids pipelines and pipelines that are not under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and homes, schools, and waterbodies.
- Support setback requirements between gas-fired power plants, petrochemical manufacturing/processing facilities and homes, schools, and waterbodies.
- Support the Commonwealth remaining in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, ensuring that power sector emissions decline significantly over time.
- Propose legislation that ensures RGGI proceeds are equitably distributed to low-income rate payers, workers, communities impacted by closures of fossil fuel generation facilities, and environmental justice communities that are disproportionately impacted by air pollution. This can be accomplished through energy efficiency, clean energy programs, and other programs identified by impacted communities as beneficial to creating clean air.
- Accelerate a transition to clean energy through subsidies, tax credits, job training, and minimum purchase requirements.
- Increase public transit to provide alternatives to private vehicle travel and reduce vehicle emissions.
- Support the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed rules to cut methane and volatile organic compound pollution from oil and gas operations and call for the rules to include a ban on flaring and inspections for small, leak-prone wells



WATER

Pennsylvania is blessed with tremendous water resources, including 86,000 miles of rivers, streams, and creeks. Unfortunately our waters face a plethora of challenges including plastics, lead, acid mine drainage, sewer overflow, and runoff fertilizer. Pennsylvania needs to stop the pollutants at the source and invest in dedicated programs that reduce runoff.

Policy Solutions

- Drinking Water
 - Establish dedicated state funds for lead service line replacements and testing for schools.
 - Adopt a drinking water maximum contamination level (MCL) for PFOA that is as low as possible but does not exceed 6 parts per trillion and one for PFOS that is no greater than 5 ppt.
 - Adopt drinking water MCLs for more PFAS compounds, including PFNA, PFHxA, PFHxS, PFHpA, and PFBS.
 - Ban firefighting foams that contain PFAS.
 - Require all Pennsylvania children have their blood tested for lead at ages one and two which health professionals believe will help address gaps in data, more accurately define the scope of the childhood lead poisoning problem, better identify lead-laden communities, and protect future children from acute exposure.
 - Phase out single-use plastics such as polystyrene food containers, single-use plastic bags, and plastic utensils.
 - Oppose any attempts to renew statewide preemption on single-use plastic regulations that would prohibit county and municipal governments from enacting or enforcing existing plastic bag bans.
 - Provide small grants for maintenance and rehabilitation of small sewage systems and private septic systems in rural areas so they are in compliance with current standards.
 - Prioritize public control of drinking water, and oppose attempts to undercut public ownership and democratic control.
- Conservation and Recreation
 - Advocate for the use of \$500 million in American Rescue Plan funds to support Growing Greener 3. In 2021, the Growing Greener Plus Program at DEP led to 150 new jobs and retained 539 existing jobs.
 - Commit to securing a long term funding source that will significantly increase Growing Greener investments.
 - Oppose any efforts that take money from existing dedicated funds (e.g., Environmental Stewardship Fund and Keystone, Recreation, Park, and Conservation Fund).
 - Develop a five-year plan to address the maintenance backlog at our state lands and restore general fund allocations and staffing to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
 - Support the use of \$250 million in American Rescue Plan funds to establish the Clean Streams Fund.
- Acid Mine Drainage (AMD)
 - Ensure that funding for AMD monitoring, assessment, and treatment considerations are prioritized and directed to environmental justice communities and coalfield communities across the Commonwealth.
 - Encourage the resource recovery of trace metals or rare earth elements from AMD and the reuse of treated mine water and underground mine pools that need further evaluation for economic development.
 - Support and advocate for clean energy alternative uses of treated AMD such as hydroelectric, pump storage, geothermal, and more.



ENERGY

Pennsylvania's future will depend on energy that is sustainable, equitable, and clean. In order to achieve this, Pennsylvania needs to move away from destructive extractive boom and bust cycles and false promises, like carbon capture, use, and storage, and hydrogen that still rely on fossil fuels, and instead invest in community resilience, proper enforcement of environmental regulations, and accelerated renewable electrification.

Policy Solutions

- Oppose false solutions that are still extractive and continue to cause pollution within its cycle, including practices like blue hydrogen and carbon capture utilization and storage.
- Close regulatory loopholes designed to favor the fossil fuel industry at the cost of Pennsylvanians' health and safety.
- No public dollars to fossil fuel companies through subsidies or state grants
- Close the hazardous waste loophole for oil and gas and monitor for radioactive materials via stricter enforcement of existing rules.
- Provide guidance, oversight, and sufficient funding for full environmental remediation of fossil fuel affected communities and sites.
- Remove preemptions for community ownership and distribution of utilities like energy, water, and internet.
- Limit the number of deficiency letters DEP can send before denying a permit.
- Equitably invest proceeds from participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).
- Incentivize clean energy adoption by households and small businesses, including making Zero-Emission Vehicles (ZEV) more affordable and expanding charging station availability.
- Incentivize practices within energy production, transportation, building construction, and industrial sectors that prioritize emissions reductions and normalize the creative development of solar energy (on brownfield sites, school rooftops, parking garages and lots)
- Update the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards (AEPS) to limit carbon-based energy as an "alternative."
- Establish bill and/or rate caps on utility costs for low-income customers in coordination with energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy incentives.
- Codify the legislative recommendations from Report 1 of the Forty-Third Statewide Investigating Grand Jury, including: expanding no-drill zones in Pennsylvania from the required 500 feet to 2,500 feet, requiring fracking companies to publicly disclose all chemicals used in drilling and hydraulic fracturing before they are used on-site, and requiring the regulation of gathering lines, used to transport unconventional gas hundreds of miles.

HOUSING AND LAND USE

Pennsylvanians' homes and communities are in need of an upgrade. Too many aging homes and schools are filled with toxins like lead, mold, and asbestos. Too many neighborhoods lack adequate green spaces, which impacts flooding, urban heat, and the psychological well-being of residents. And too much of the Commonwealth does not have reliable public transit, which is both an equity and environmental problem. Public funding, zoning reform, and conservation efforts are needed to help resolve these issues.

Policy Solutions

- Publicly fund affordable, healthy homes through home repairs, lead and asbestos abatements, and weatherization/electrification programs in environmental justice communities. Include strong tenant protections against displacement and rent increases, so that the state does not inadvertently harm tenants while making the housing stock healthier and more resilient. Use these programs to build out a workforce of energy and air quality auditors and other unionized green jobs.



- Enact comprehensive inclusionary zoning and land use plans that address climate resilience, such as incentivizing conservation and transit-oriented development, public transportation, bike lanes, and greenway trails in land use planning to reduce sprawl and the negative environmental and social impacts of auto-dependent land use policy.
- Utilize Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funds to support pedestrian, biking, and public transportation infrastructure. Examples include adequate LED street lighting, ADA accessible curbs, bus shelters with seating, proper street signage, and working crossing signals.
- Establish statewide benchmarking and building performance standards and regularly update building codes.
- Achieve 30x30 – conserving and Protecting at least 30% of PA’s lands by the year 2030. Ensuring that lands are protected to promote critical habitat conservation, cultural heritage and nature based economic development through fully funding and programming PA DCNR’s eight Conservation Landscapes across the state and providing for the acquisitions and management of additional networks of Conservation Landscapes.
- Support smart land-use legislation that identifies green infrastructure corridors and methods to protect them.
- Ensure that all affordable housing funded by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency is built to a net zero standard.
- Require all municipalities to accept their fair share of affordable housing by supporting statewide inclusionary zoning legislation.
- Local governments and the PA Department of Transportation need to evaluate, rank, and prioritize infrastructure projects, ensuring adequate lighting, shelter, and road conditions.
- Provide municipalities and state agencies grant programs and incentives to prioritize green storm-water infrastructure over traditional systems.
- Restore funding to Act 167 (Stormwater Management Act) planning efforts to ensure counties and municipalities have ordinances based on local watersheds.
- Provide incentives and protections for riparian forested buffers, or streamside trees, a cost-effective way to improve stream health. Establish minimum standards with additional requirements given to lands adjacent to special protection waterways and allow municipalities to create local ordinances.
- Use federal funding to support weatherization, repair, and energy efficiency projects for public schools.

LABOR

Pennsylvania workers need to be central in the transition to a clean, green economy. Every worker must have the right to unionize, access to family-bolstering jobs, and proper workplace protections. Solutions include increasing the minimum wage, ensuring government projects pay prevailing wages, and an equitable transition to an eco-friendly workforce development.

Policy Solutions

- Spend Pennsylvania’s federal appropriations from the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs act equitably:
 - Pennsylvania agencies should publicly track federal investments to provide accountability that state agencies receiving federal funds are distributing those funds by looking through a new, updated lens for workers and new workforce programs that considers emerging industries and workforces and promoting unionization in those new sectors;
 - Instruct state agencies to actively pursue investments of federal dollars in disinvested communities and workers;
 - Create a public database to track where investments are going and who is getting state contracts to complete the work that includes both material procurement and workforce recruitment.



- Prevailing wage laws must be expanded for any project that uses any form of government funding while also encouraging and respecting labor agreements between unions.
- Increase the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and repeal minimum wage preemption that causes disparities in economic conditions across the state.
- Promote more workforce development and hands on training programs and opportunities for those entering or reentering the workforce (e.g. alternative energy, eco-tourism)
- Work with the Department of Labor to ensure that diverse workforces and subcontractors are hired and promoted to increase the likelihood of a level playing field through strong policies.
- Ensure federal well plugging and mine reclamation funding goes to Pennsylvania pro-union employers and do the same with federal investments in other sectors like water, electric vehicle, and other investments.
- Incentivize renewable energy jobs – and promote unionization in these new jobs – to expand in Pennsylvania by providing necessary tax credits and subsidies that are similarly afforded to the fossil fuel industry.
- Provide equitable access to infrastructure and transportation by utilizing IJA funding and recreating a sustainable version of Act 89 to increase the availability for workers to access jobs.
- Develop training programs, and/or establish a 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps, that provide the skills to install and maintain conservation and natural infrastructure.
- Make sure workers from the fossil fuel industry have first chance at green jobs while strongly pushing for unionization through requiring incentives like labor project agreements and paying union scale wage rates.
- Fully implement the Biden Administration's Justice40 principles in Pennsylvania by ensuring that 40% of economic investments in workers and industries go to environmental justice communities.



DEMOCRACY

Pennsylvanians cannot ensure their environmental rights are protected without a functioning, reflective, and equitable democratic society. Policies to achieve this include reforms to make voting more accessible, more funding for election administration, and ensuring that our state courts are not gerrymandered.

Policy Solutions

- Advocate for and support pro-voter legislation that improves access to and properly funds our elections.
- Defend against legislative attempts to roll back voting rights and access, including attempts to eliminate voting by mail, institute voter ID requirements, or otherwise weaken our democratic processes.
- Enact same day voter registration to encourage registration when residents are at their most engaged and to enable real-time corrections to inaccurate voter rolls.
- Enact automatic voter registration which would send eligible residents registration information when they interact with various government programs, dramatically expanding the voting pool and ensuring more accurate records.
- Enact reforms that would allow for early in-person voting, which would relieve crowding at the polls on Election Day and ensure equitable access by empowering those who work difficult schedules or have family care commitments to vote whenever works best for them.
- Ensure all Pennsylvania counties have adequate polling locations and vote-by-mail drop boxes.

- Improve new vote by mail laws to allow for a cure process and pre-canvassing. Pre-canvassing would allow counties to start counting ballots before Election Day and a cure process would allow for voters who make simple mistakes on their ballot to fix them so their votes are counted.
- Increase funding for safe, secure, and efficient elections. County election departments must be properly resourced, particularly so they can invest in new technology like electronic poll books which help ensure accuracy and security.
- Improve language access at the polls so all voters can access ballots and instructions in their own language.
- Ensure that eligible current and former incarcerated citizens are informed of their right to vote. For example, pass policies that will require county jails in the state to have consistent and universal procedures for voter registration, voting by mail, and voter education and outreach.
- Change the current structure of legislative committees to ensure no one party can halt bills from coming to the full legislature for a vote.
- Protect the independence of Pennsylvania's judiciary by opposing legislation that would gerrymander our courts through a ballot initiative.

EDUCATION

In order to ensure that future Pennsylvanians understand and appreciate the importance of our environment, environmental education must be a fundamental part of every K-12 school's curriculum. This must include both theoretical and hands-on learning, and must be available to all students regardless of their zip code. Policies to make this a reality include increasing K-12 education funding and committing to appointing a Secretary of Education that values environmental education.

Policy Solutions

- Increase K-12 education funding so schools have the resources they need to implement an environmental curriculum.
- Support the updated PA Integrated Standards for Science, Environment and Ecology (Grades 6-12), which will provide a cohesive K-12 integrated approach to science, environment and ecology education in Pennsylvania.
- Implement place-based environmental curriculum, using Maryland's Environmental Literacy Standards as a guide.
- Appoint a Secretary of Education that values environmental education as part of the K-12 curriculum.
- Use federal investments to retrofit school buildings for energy efficiency and weatherization, and make the environmental connection for students between these improvements and the quality of education.



GUARANTEEING OUR RIGHT TO CLEAN AIR AND A HEALTHY CLIMATE

The State of Climate Change in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's climate is changing. The Commonwealth has warmed more than 1 degree Celsius (1.8 °F) over the last century and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) most recent [Climate Impacts Assessment](#)¹ indicates the state will continue to warm. Pennsylvania averaged 5 days above 90°F per year between 1971-2000, but it's expected to average 37 days per year by mid-century.



Another consequence of climate change is increased precipitation. Heavy rainstorms are more frequent, and the tidal portion of the Delaware River is rising about one inch every eight years. In the coming decades, the changing climate is likely to increase flooding, harm ecosystems, disrupt farming, and increase some risks to human health. However, these hazards don't impact everyone equally. Communities of color and low-income people face greater risks from the effects of our changing climate and the carbon pollution causing it.

Pennsylvania was the fourth-largest emitter of carbon dioxide nationally in 2018 and was responsible for approximately 269 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent being emitted into the atmosphere. Many sectors emit greenhouse gasses (GHGs) in Pennsylvania including: residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, electricity production, agriculture, waste management, and forestry. The industrial, transportation, and electricity production sectors in particular account for approximately 82% of our GHG emissions.

To address carbon pollution from fossil fuel fired power plants, Governor Wolf and the DEP finalized their *CO₂ Budget Trading Program* rule², establishing a pathway for Pennsylvania to participate in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). RGGI is a market-based collaboration among ten Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and combat climate change.

The participating states set a cap on total carbon emissions from electric power generators in their states. In order to show compliance with the cap, power plants must purchase an allowance for each ton of carbon pollution they emit. These purchases are made at quarterly auctions conducted by RGGI. The proceeds from the auctions are allocated back to the participating states.

Once Pennsylvania is formally participating in RGGI, we must ensure that the proceeds are being used to solve pressing issues such as investing in the communities that have been historically most impacted by polluting industries, providing direct support to dislocated workers experiencing impacts from the closure of existing power plants, and supporting investments in energy efficiency, and clean and renewable energy investments.

Health Impacts of Air Quality Concerns

Climate change is expected to worsen air quality, and The American Lung Association's most recent [State of the Air report](#)³ shows little improvement in Pennsylvania's air despite continued investment in pollution controls for industry, electric generation, and electric vehicles. Pittsburgh and Philadelphia have some of the worst air quality in the country and counties like Dauphin, Lancaster, and Lehigh are trending in the wrong direction. Just ten industrial facilities in Allegheny County emitted more than 955,000 pounds of toxic pollutants in 2016, contributing more than 70% of the air pollution that comes from all industrial sources in the county.

Automobiles, industrial facilities, and power plants all emit significant amounts of air pollution. When these sources burn fossil fuels, they emit particle pollution and ozone precursors (nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds). Both pollutants have been linked to heart attacks, asthma attacks, and the development of chronic bronchitis. Even low levels of ground-level ozone can aggravate respiratory diseases, which leads to more visits to health care providers and admissions to emergency rooms and hospitals. Air pollutants, such as fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), are also carcinogenic, and diesel exhaust is especially harmful because of how close the concentrated pollution can be to the people breathing it in. This is particularly devastating for children, where exposure to diesel exhaust has been associated with increased levels of asthma and negative

¹ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, "[Pennsylvania Climate Impacts Assessment 2021](#)" (May 2021)

² Pennsylvania Bulletin, "[CO₂ Budget Trading Program](#)" (April 23, 2022)

³ American Lung Association, "[State of the Air 2022](#)" (2022)

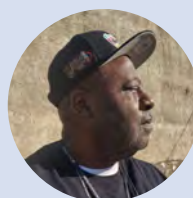
impacts on neurological development, including reduced memory and IQ points.⁴ Pennsylvania has the dubious distinction of leading the nation in premature deaths per capita caused by air pollution.

Policy Solutions

- Require facilities seeking permits within EJ communities to prepare a cumulative environmental impact assessment and health risk assessment that includes any potential negative impacts they may have on the surrounding area. The DEP should then be empowered to deny a permit application based on the results of the cumulative impacts.
- Provide funding for increased air quality monitoring, which includes community monitoring and facility site monitoring.
- Oppose all new subsidies for petrochemical facilities in Pennsylvania. Support increased, science-backed setback requirements (protective buffers) between fracking, compressor stations, and processing plants and homes, schools, and waterbodies.
- No permit renewals for facilities with outstanding violations.
- Endorse policies aimed at equitable electrification of public transit, school buses, heavy duty truck traffic, as well as personal cars and infrastructure development
- Establish new setback requirements between certain non-public utility gas and natural gas liquids pipelines and pipelines that are not under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and homes, schools, and waterbodies.
- Support setback requirements between gas-fired power plants, petrochemical manufacturing/processing facilities and homes, schools, and waterbodies.
- Support the Commonwealth remaining in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, ensuring that power sector emissions decline significantly over time.
- Propose legislation⁵ that ensures RGGI proceeds are equitably distributed to low-income rate payers, workers, communities impacted by closures of fossil fuel generation facilities, and environmental justice communities that are disproportionately impacted by air pollution. This can be accomplished through energy efficiency, clean energy programs, and other programs identified by impacted communities as beneficial to creating clean air.
- Accelerate a transition to clean energy through subsidies, tax credits, job training, and minimum purchase requirements.

- Increase public transit to provide alternatives to private vehicle travel and reduce vehicle emissions.
- Support the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed rules to cut methane and volatile organic compound pollution from oil and gas operations and call for the rules to include a ban on flaring and inspections for small, leak-prone wells.

AIR



Charles Reeves
Philadelphia County

My name is Charles Reeves, and I've lived in Gray's Ferry in Philadelphia for my whole life, 63 years. I grew up in the refinery times, next to the housing projects and just across the expressway from the refinery. My father was an activist, talking with Sunoco back when they were the owners. During the early '70's, my father was fighting them because he kept questioning the air quality. The city and Sunoco kept saying it was fine, it wasn't doing anything to us. But my family was hurt. My mother, my father, my wife's mother – they all died from cancer. I have cancer now as does my sister-in-law. We lost a whole generation of grandparents, and our kids have asthma now. Everyone who has been here a while has been touched by this.

Companies seeking permits should have to consider the health of the community and everything we have faced until now. If there's questions about what you are doing, just don't do it. Having cleaner air and not having to worry would be amazing. I've carried this burden for a lifetime, so I can't even imagine what it would be like to have it lifted. Imagine if I just didn't have to worry about my kids playing in the grass? What if I didn't have to worry about my grandkids? If I could be around for my grandkids' kids, our family would be that much stronger. Our community in the future shouldn't have to go through what we went through.

⁴ Liu, N. M., and Grigg, J., "Diesel, children and respiratory disease", BMJ Paediatrics Open (May 24, 2018)

⁵ An example legislation is the RGGI Investment Act (House Bill 1565 and Senate Bill 15) from Representative Dianne Herrin and Senator Carolyn Comitta in the 2021-2022 legislative session.

SAFEGUARDING OUR RIGHT TO PURE WATER

Pennsylvania is blessed with abundant water resources, with 86,000 miles of rivers, streams, and creeks. We swim, fish, and relax in our water resources and they provide drinking water for millions of people. We also have a right to 'pure water', guaranteed to us by the Environmental Rights Amendment in our state constitution. Unfortunately, one-third of our waters are polluted and don't meet safe standards for what's fishable or swimmable. Legacy pollution from coal mining, agricultural runoff, urban and suburban stormwater, other contaminants, and forever chemicals are harming our waters and our communities. Meanwhile, private corporations threaten our public control over managing our drinking water.

The PA Department of Environmental Protection's 2022 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring Report⁶ reported that 7,356 miles are impaired from abandoned mine drainage (AMD) alone, making it Pennsylvania's number one source of water pollution. Mine discharges and acidic runoff from coal refuse piles, unreclaimed abandoned mine lands, and abandoned culm silt basins from historic abandoned mine collieries and properties that are not actively mined are the main causes of these damaged waterways. However, thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Pennsylvania will have access to \$3 billion of Federal money for the purpose of funding abandoned mine land reclamation (AML) and AMD cleanup that will help improve our lands and waterways.

Threats to Drinking Water

Forever Chemicals

Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are artificial toxic chemicals that include thousands of compounds. They're traditionally found in industrial and consumer products that are water and stain-resistant. Fire-fighting foam used in training activities at airports and military bases are often a major source of water contamination, in some instances depriving communities of clean drinking water. High levels of contamination have been found on former military bases in Horsham and Warminster in Bucks and Montgomery counties and in the drinking water for the surrounding communities. Through sampling in 2021, DEP also found PFAS in 61 different public water systems across the Commonwealth which service over 200,000 Pennsylvanians.

These 'forever chemicals' are persistent in the environment and do not readily break down. They can be found in air, soil, and water and are also very persistent in the human body. PFAS and related compounds are considered emerging contaminants because the risks they pose to human health and the environment are not completely understood. However, research has concluded a probable link of PFAS to adverse health effects in laboratory animals and humans.

Lead

There is no safe level of lead in drinking water. We know that lead exposure in children damages the brain and nervous system, slows growth and development, and can lower IQ and cause learning and behavior problems. Yet, 5% of Pennsylvania's children have elevated levels of lead in their blood at more than two times the national rate.⁷ We also had the second-highest number of children in the nation who tested positive for lead poisoning and of the 10 states with the highest rates of lead poisoning, the Commonwealth was the second-worst at testing for lead. Of those tested, Black and Hispanic children had higher percentages of elevated blood lead levels than white children.⁸ Children living at or below the poverty line, in older housing, or in communities with high concentrations of poverty are at the greatest risk of the toxic effects of lead.⁹

Plastics

Plastics do not biodegrade, instead they become smaller and smaller pieces known as microplastics. Other common types of microplastics include nurdles, which are small plastic pellets used to make new plastic products, and microfibers, which are plastic fibers found in our clothes.

These microplastics enter our environment as litter, through wastewater, industrial processes, and plastics deposited in landfills which can easily be carried by wind and weather and deposited elsewhere.



⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, "[Draft 2022 Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Report](#)" (2022)

⁷ Gantz, S., "Blood lead levels among Pennsylvania children higher than average, study finds", *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (September 30, 2021)

⁸ Black children face lead poisoning at five times the rate of white children. Hispanic children at twice the rate of white children

⁹ Maxey, H., Clash, B., and Bishop, S., "[Preventing Childhood Lead Exposure in Pennsylvania: Lead remediation can help prevent future crime](#)", *Council For A Strong America* (May 2021)

Microplastics are a widespread problem and have been found in domestic tap and bottled waters and from Mt. Everest to the Marianas Trench. In Pennsylvania, plastic is the most common form of visible litter. For example, the Philadelphia Water Department removed 44 tons of trash from a 32 mile stretch of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers in a single year and over half of the trash was plastics.¹⁰ In a recent study, water samples were taken from fifty-three rivers, creeks, and lakes in Pennsylvania. One hundred percent of the samples contained one or more types of microplastics.¹¹ Humans and animals are inadvertently consuming these microplastics and the health effects of that consumption are an evolving area of research.

Conservation and Recreation

Growing Greener III

We saw record numbers of Pennsylvanians seek refuge in the great outdoors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions flocked to our state parks and state forests to hike, swim, fish, and camp. In 2020 there were nearly 47 million individual visits to our state parks, an increase of about 27% over the previous year and those numbers continue to remain high. Parks and forests are also economically important in Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth ranks fifth in the nation for consumer spending on outdoor recreation, generating \$29.1 billion annually, supporting 251,00 jobs, and generating \$1.9 billion in state and local tax revenue. For every dollar invested in state parks, \$12.41 returns to the Commonwealth.¹²

Unfortunately, our state government has not prioritized investments in our state parks and forests and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has a \$1.4 billion backlog in needed work for infrastructure repairs and improvements. Issues like addressing wear and tear, extreme weather and climate change impacts, and a high demand for outdoor recreation have been ignored for too long.

Everyone deserves access to nature and outdoor recreation and its associated health benefits without having to travel far. Research has shown that outdoor recreation helps to release stress and restore people's sense of well-being. According to a recent poll, two-thirds of Pennsylvanians agree that state lawmakers should place a high priority on funding for state parks and forests.¹³ This agreement was broad-based and

WATER



Ivy Westmoreland
Allegheny County

My name is Ivy Westmoreland, and I've lived in Pittsburgh for over 15 years. I'm a mother of 5, and my two youngest are teenagers that live at home with me. About seven years ago, the sewers on my block started acting up. My landlord would come and bring the pump. But four years ago, it got much worse, and the water started coming down a lot more. It started happening so often that we started keeping a hose and pumps in the alley for all the neighbors to share. There have been multiple times where we have to pump out the basement and wash it. I've lost so many things I had in the basement, like my washer and dryer, my comforter, my sheets, and other things. It's so stressful and depressing having to go down the stairs and worry what I'll find or what I'll have to throw away.

My son is often the one to check the basement each day. Sometimes he doesn't want to, because he's a teenager and he wants to do his own thing, but he also gets scared to have me go down because I've fallen down before. We've all fallen because it's so slippery when we have to sweep out the water. I hate having to ask him every day "Jaquar, did you check the basement? Jaquar, did you check the basement?" People ask why we don't just move but it's not like it's easy to find another place.

If we didn't have this stormwater issue, we would be so much less stressed. We wouldn't have to worry about going downstairs every day to check if there's water in the basement. Everything would be okay with this house, and we wouldn't have to worry about moving. I feel hopeful from going to meetings with other people having the same issue and hearing these problems are going to be fixed. Because it's not just me, it's at least four other families on my block. Everybody would be relieved, everybody would be happier and healthier when this problem gets fixed.

¹⁰ PennEnvironment Research and Policy Center, "[Microplastics in Pennsylvania A survey of waterways](#)" (March 3, 2021)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, "[Wolf Administration Highlights How Recovery Funds Could Help With Infrastructure Needs At Shawnee State Park In Bedford County](#)" (March 30, 2022)

¹³ Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, "[Pennsylvanians Support Increased Funding for State Parks and Forests](#)" (April 11, 2022)

bipartisan, including majorities of voters regardless of their party affiliation, age, gender, geography, or ethnicity.

Since its inception in 1999, the state's Growing Greener program has been both hugely successful and popular. It has funded hundreds of local parks and trail projects, conserved more than 80,000 acres of threatened open space, and restored hundreds of miles of streams and waterways. The program has also protected more than 78,000 acres of farmland, restored more than 1,600 acres of abandoned mine land, and helped reduce flooding and water pollution through 400 watershed protection projects and more than 100 drinking and wastewater treatment improvements.

Regrettably, funding for this program has lagged for years and demand far outstrips available resources. However, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds provide a unique opportunity to increase investment in this worthwhile program. As of this writing, there are House and Senate companion bills that would invest \$500 million of ARP funds into a Growing Greener III.¹⁴ Additionally, Governor Wolf's 2022-23 budget calls for a \$450 million boost in state conservation investments.

Growing Greener III would invest in projects that can be realized now and will deliver huge returns on the investment for decades to come. From nature-based solutions that prevent flooding and stream degradation, to repair and maintenance of parks and trails, to protection of open spaces and wildlife habitats that serve as a part of a solid foundation for the Commonwealth's tourism and outdoor recreation economies, ARP dollars can make a tremendous difference in the lives of Pennsylvanians.

Clean Streams Fund

Pennsylvania's waterways are in need of major restoration efforts with one-third of all rivers and streams designated as "impaired," or failing to meet key water quality benchmarks. The top three causes of water pollution in Pennsylvania are acid mine drainage (AMD), agriculture, and stormwater runoff.

The Clean Streams Fund (CSF) would address Pennsylvania's top three causes of water pollution by boosting existing programs and establishing new programs. The CSF proposes investing \$250 million from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to create Pennsylvania's first program dedicated solely to water protection and improvements.

The top three causes of water pollution in Pennsylvania are acid mine drainage (AMD), agriculture, and stormwater runoff.



The main focus of the CSF would be the creation of an Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP). ACAP would receive half of the CSF's proposed amount to establish a new program to assist local farmers with practices that improve and modernize farms and benefit local waterways. Like the successful Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Roads Program, ACAP would be administered through the State Conservation Commission and implemented locally by County Conservation Districts based on agriculture's impact on water quality.

Another program that would benefit from the CSF is the AMD Abatement and Treatment Fund. This fund would receive 20% of the Clean Stream Fund, which would go towards addressing the toxic waterways left behind by legacy coal mining operations. Finally, a new Municipal Stormwater Assistance Program would be established and funded with 10% of the CSF to provide municipalities with assistance to plan and implement practices that reduce stormwater runoff and improve local streams.

¹⁴ See the Growing Greener III Act (House Bill 2020 and Senate Bill 525) from Representative Lynda Schlegel Culver and Senator John Gordner in the 2021-2022 legislative session.

Policy Solutions

• Drinking Water

- Establish dedicated state funds for lead service line replacements and testing for schools.
- Adopt a drinking water maximum contamination level (MCL) for PFOA that is as low as possible but does not exceed 6 parts per trillion¹⁵ and one for PFOS that is no greater than 5 ppt.¹⁶
- Adopt drinking water MCLs for more PFAS compounds, including PFNA, PFHxA, PFHxS, PFHpA, and PFBS.
- Ban firefighting foams that contain PFAS.
- Require all Pennsylvania children have their blood tested for lead at ages one and two which health professionals believe will help address gaps in data, more accurately define the scope of the childhood lead poisoning problem, better identify lead-laden communities, and protect future children from acute exposure.
- Phase out single-use plastics such as polystyrene food containers, single-use plastic bags, and plastic utensils.
- Oppose any attempts to renew statewide preemption on single-use plastic regulations that would prohibit county and municipal governments from enacting or enforcing existing plastic bag bans.
- Provide small grants for maintenance and rehabilitation of small sewage systems and private septic systems in rural areas so they are in compliance with current standards.
- Prioritize public control of drinking water, and oppose attempts to undercut public ownership and democratic control.

• Conservation and Recreation

- Advocate for the use of \$500 million in American Rescue Plan funds to support Growing Greener 3.¹⁷ In 2021, the Growing Greener Plus Program at DEP led to 150 new jobs and retained 539 existing jobs.
- Commit to securing a long term funding source that will significantly increase Growing Greener investments.
- Oppose any efforts that take money from existing dedicated funds (e.g., Environmental Stewardship Fund and Keystone, Recreation, Park, and Conservation Fund).

- Develop a five-year plan to address the maintenance backlog at our state lands and restore general fund allocations and staffing to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.
- Support the use of \$250 million in American Rescue Plan funds to establish the Clean Streams Fund.

• Acid Mine Drainage (AMD)

- Ensure that funding for AMD monitoring, assessment, and treatment considerations are prioritized and directed to environmental justice communities and coalfield communities across the Commonwealth.
- Encourage the resource recovery of trace metals or rare earth elements from AMD and the reuse of treated mine water and underground mine pools that need further evaluation for economic development.
- Support and advocate for clean energy alternative uses of treated AMD such as hydroelectric, pump storage, geothermal, and more.



¹⁵ Oliaei, F.Z., and Kriens, D.L., "Proposed Health-Based Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) in Drinking Water. Technical Analysis of New Jersey Drinking Water Quality Institute", Cambridge Environmental Consulting (November 18, 2016)

¹⁶ Oliaei, F.Z., and Kriens, D.L., "Technical Analysis of New Jersey's Proposed Health-Based Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS)", Cambridge Environmental Consulting (January 2018)

¹⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, "[Pennsylvania's Phase 3 Watershed Implementation Plan: Partners, Projects, Progress](#)", (February 3, 2022)

INVEST IN AN ENERGY POLICY THAT SUPPORTS PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Pennsylvania has been an energy leader in the past: in order to remain a leader as the energy landscape continues to shift, we must lead in new, innovative ways that prioritize real and effective solutions and ensure that all Pennsylvanians have their energy needs met. Unfortunately, in many ways, Pennsylvania is falling behind other states' progress, but we have the power to change that.

Equitable energy access and effective energy solutions must empower, invest, advance, and modernize the ways that we produce, use, regulate, and incentivize energy.

We can empower Pennsylvania's communities – especially rural and low-income communities – to meet their residents' utility needs by addressing preemption. Instead of creating and protecting barriers to access, our state must get out of the way so that local municipalities and co-ops can improve access to energy, water, and internet. The current model for providing these critical services relies on private providers that make decisions about where they will provide quality service based on the number of people who will pay them, leaving those who live in lower density areas or in economically disadvantaged areas to go without these critical services. This is inequitable and unjustifiable. Our state can and must support local leadership on these issues, providing guidance and support to those who are filling these gaps.

We must also empower our regulatory agencies to work for Pennsylvanians, not for private industry. Pennsylvania needs a "three strikes" rule because too many applicants seek permits from the Department of Environmental Protection without submitting the required paperwork, even after consulting with the Department and even after having previously navigated the permitting process. Limiting the number of administrative deficiency letters to three will protect taxpayers, whose dollars effectively subsidize the fossil fuel industry, and will protect Department staff, whose time does not need to be monopolized by industry hand-holding.

We can invest in Pennsylvanians' equitable access to energy by making sure our public dollars are used to reduce costs and improve infrastructure. When Pennsylvania's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative starts to deliver proceeds, we must invest in the communities most impacted by our current fossil-fueled power sector, including economic development in communities where power plants have operated and support for lowering energy costs for low-income Pennsylvanians. Any plans for economic development must ensure that we are investing in a sustainable future and good, family-sustaining jobs for Pennsylvanians that won't leave communities behind like the vicious boom-and-bust cycle of our fossil-fueled past. We must also make sure that Pennsylvanians are able to afford to participate in the new energy markets. When we, as a Commonwealth, help households and small businesses to cover the upfront costs of clean energy – from installing solar panels to purchasing zero-emissions vehicles – we are helping Pennsylvanians lower their overall energy costs well into the future.

However, making changes at the household level won't be enough to change our energy landscape: Pennsylvania must invest in building out our renewable energy infrastructure in creative ways. Expanding charging station availability across the Commonwealth, and including rural areas in that availability, is only one component of clean energy infrastructure development. We must also analyze our energy production, transportation, building construction, and industrial sectors to identify opportunities for improved practices: every new parking lot is an opportunity to install solar panels that both collect energy and provide shade; every new or updated school building is an opportunity to install solar or invest in rooftop greenspace. Investments in remediation for old industrial sites are opportunities to promote environmental health and economic growth.



In addition to taking bad policies off of our books, we must reassess our Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards (AEPS) to ensure that fossil-fuel and carbon-based energy sources are not designated as an “alternative.”

We can advance Pennsylvania’s position as an energy leader by rejecting false climate “solutions” that simply perpetuate our reliance on fossil fuels. Relying on carbon capture and storage or becoming a hub for blue hydrogen will not help Pennsylvania meet our climate goals or create new, sustainable jobs: these technologies use fossil fuels as a process input and require additional energy to make them work. Heavy investment in this kind of unreliable technology at a time when we must prioritize reductions in greenhouse gas emissions would set Pennsylvania back rather than move us towards a clean energy future.

We must also modernize some of the laws and standards on our book to reflect the improved understanding of what will truly benefit Pennsylvania residents and help us meet our climate goals. The hazardous waste loophole protects oil and gas operators from realizing the full cost of their activity, allowing for potentially hazardous, inaccurately tested and treated waste to pollute our communities, while shifting cleanup costs to taxpayers. The oil and gas industry already claims that their waste is safe. Closing this loophole ensures that they don’t make false claims at the cost of our residents’ health and well-being.

In addition to taking bad policies off of our books, we must reassess our Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards (AEPS) to ensure that fossil-fuel and carbon-based energy sources are not designated as an “alternative.” These standards are intended to promote the development and use of clean, sustainable energy; however, as-written, these standards include practices like burning waste coal for electricity generation. The AEPS Act was written in 2004, when Pennsylvania and the world shared a different understanding of the threat of climate change, and when the cost of producing energy was heavily weighted against renewables. Much has changed since 2004, and we need our standards to reflect that.

We must close the loopholes for hazardous waste. Fossil gas is only economically competitive with clean energy if the industry is able to socialize the costs of its pollution. One aspect of gas production that is particularly poorly regulated is the handling

ENERGY



Veronica Coptis
Greene County

My name is Veronica Coptis, and I’m a mom of two in Southwestern PA. I grew up in Greene County next to the largest underground coal mining complex in the state. I felt totally powerless as it was expanding. I heard all the time about how there weren’t leaders willing to stand with us. Knowing how few elected officials were willing to stand with our community made me feel like staying in PA was not my best option. But I love the community I grew up in and wanted to stay. Now I’m raising my kids nearby, and we’re surrounded by oil and gas development and abandoned mine operations. My neighbors and I don’t even feel comfortable drinking our tap water. We need our leaders to take all steps to protect our drinking water for the health of our kids.

In addition to pollution exposure, my community is struggling economically from the decline of the coal industry. Having leaders oppose false solutions that will keep our communities poor is our only way out and into economic prosperity. We need elected officials to stand with us, the working people of Pennsylvania, and not with the major corporations pretending to have the answers. I want my community to prosper so that my daughters can continue to grow up in Greene County and eventually raise their families here, allowing me to be the same kind of involved grandparent that they have now.



and disposal of toxic wastewater and drill cuttings. In fact, the EPA itself recognized in writing that proper regulation of oil and gas wastes as “hazardous” under the Resource Recovery and Conservation Act would effectively kill the industry when it codified a key regulatory loophole in 1988. At that time, there were no commercially viable clean energy alternatives to oil and gas, but that is no longer the case today.

Finally, there are serious safety concerns with fossil fuel development that must be adequately addressed. Oil and gas deposits tend to coincide with high levels of radioactive elements, and the Marcellus shale is especially high in radium, which readily leaches into salty fracking fluid and is transported to the surface. Radium is extremely dangerous to humans when inhaled, ingested, or absorbed into the body, and yet there are virtually no labeling or handling regulations, poor tracking of where it goes, and very few limits on how it can be disposed of. There are several other toxic chemicals in oil and gas waste, such as benzene, but under current Pennsylvania law they can often be discharged into water or dumped onto roads with limited restrictions. Progress must be made not only in Pennsylvania, but in adjacent states and the federal level as well, in order to avoid simply sending waste to the places where disposal is easiest and cheapest.

We know that Pennsylvania can be a leader on energy policy, but it will require a commitment to building a strong foundation for future economic growth that is equitable and thoughtful while also enabling Pennsylvania to meet our climate goals and achieve zero-carbon emissions by 2050.

Policy Solutions

- Oppose false solutions that are still extractive and continue to cause pollution within its cycle, including practices like blue hydrogen and carbon capture utilization and storage.
- Close regulatory loopholes designed to favor the fossil fuel industry at the cost of Pennsylvanians’ health and safety.
- No public dollars to fossil fuel companies through subsidies or state grants
- Close the hazardous waste loophole for oil and gas and monitor for radioactive materials via stricter enforcement of existing rules.
- Provide guidance, oversight, and sufficient funding for full environmental remediation of fossil fuel affected communities and sites.
- Remove preemptions for community ownership and distribution of utilities like energy, water, and internet.
- Limit the number of deficiency letters DEP can send before denying a permit.
- Equitably invest proceeds from participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).
- Incentivize clean energy adoption by households and small businesses, including making Zero-Emission Vehicles (ZEV) more affordable and expanding charging station availability.
- Incentivize practices within energy production, transportation, building construction, and industrial sectors that prioritize emissions reductions and normalize the creative development of solar energy (on brownfield sites, school rooftops, parking garages and lots)
- Update the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards (AEPS) to limit carbon-based energy as an “alternative.”
- Establish bill and/or rate caps on utility costs for low-income customers in coordination with energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy incentives.
- Codify the legislative recommendations from *Report 1 of the Forty-Third Statewide Investigating Grand Jury*, including: expanding no-drill zones in Pennsylvania from the required 500 feet to 2,500 feet, requiring fracking companies to publicly disclose all chemicals used in drilling and hydraulic fracturing before they are used on-site, and requiring the regulation of gathering lines, used to transport unconventional gas hundreds of miles.¹⁸

¹⁸ Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General, “[43rd Statewide Grand Jury Finds Pennsylvania Failed To Protect Citizens During Fracking Boom](#)” (June 25, 2020)

HOUSING AND LAND USE THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL PENNSYLVANIANS

Though housing is one of our most basic needs, Pennsylvanians in every region of the state still struggle to find safe, affordable places to live. This problem stretches from rural areas where departing industries left poverty in their wake, to cities where rising rents displace long-time residents. Meanwhile, the lack of community land control prevents vacant lots and other underused land from being turned into quality housing or much-needed green space. By investing in home repairs, weatherization, green infrastructure, and green space, the Commonwealth can begin a virtuous cycle. Fewer people will face displacement, making communities safer. Homes without lead, mold, and asbestos make healthier children and families. Electrified housing is better prepared to withstand the changing climate and reduces asthma rates by removing on-site combustion of fossil fuels. Weatherization work will create good jobs, further increasing economic stability and ultimately saving the state money in the long term.¹⁹

Updating Pennsylvania's Aging Housing Stock

The Commonwealth's housing stock is old, with an estimated 280,000 occupied units in need of repair.²⁰ These aging structures expose hundreds of thousands of residents, many of them children, to toxic substances like lead, asbestos, and mold. Their home's energy inefficiency makes it very expensive to heat or cool them, but their need for repair often disqualifies these homes from public weatherization programs. The changing climate will only exacerbate these issues in the years to come as rising temperatures and increased precipitation cause further damage. Few resources exist to fund the maintenance that would keep children healthy and families housed while also protecting the environment.

Since World War II, government-sanctioned practices like redlining have positioned housing as one of the primary levers reinforcing structural racism. As a result, Black and brown Pennsylvanians have borne the brunt of the housing crisis.²¹ When residents are displaced, crime rates increase, while research shows that repairing even one home on a block reduces crime by over 20%.²² Local government actions that preclude the development of affordable housing in their communities have the double effect of limiting the supply of affordable homes and perpetuating racial



segregation. Requiring municipalities to accept affordable housing would help alleviate both problems. The billions of dollars flowing into the state through the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act present a unique opportunity to finally address housing as the systemic, not individual, problem that it has always been.

Green Spaces

Improving the quality and availability of affordable housing is one piece of the puzzle. However, without responsible land use policies to protect the area surrounding this housing, it matters less how affordable the housing is. Investments in state parks and habitat conservation need to continue to be made and at a larger scale. As the effects of climate change continue to produce "once in a century" storms with greater frequency, the consequences of not investing in greenspaces, like wetlands and parks, and green infrastructure like permeable pavement and rain gardens, will be more extreme.

¹⁹ An example legislation is the Whole Home Repairs Fund Act (SB 1135) introduced by Senator Nikil Saval in the 2021-22 legislative session.

²⁰ United States Census Bureau, "[American Housing Survey \(AHS\) Table Creator](#)" (2019)

²¹ The Reinvestment Fund, "[Race and Housing in Pennsylvania](#)" (2007)

²² South, E. C., MacDonald, J., and Reina, V., "[Association Between Structural Housing Repairs for Low-Income Homeowners and Neighborhood Crime](#)", *JAMA Network Open* (July 21, 2021)

HOUSING



Rafael Diaz
Lancaster County

My name is Rafael Diaz, and I'm in seminary to become a chaplain. My wife and I both grew up in Lancaster County and lived for ten years in the city of Lancaster. We were priced out by the time we were ready to buy a home, but we were excited to find an affordable house nearby in Marietta in 2017. The house was built in the late 1700's and is on a floodplain, which we knew when we bought it, but we didn't understand how overwhelming the maintenance and upkeep would be, or what a big impact it would have on our lives.

About a month after we moved in, the roof started leaking from the ceiling and needed to be replaced. It turned out our inspector had fabricated information about the roof, which led to our homeowners insurance being canceled entirely. Since then, we've spent month after month navigating expensive repairs, choosing which is one most urgent instead of being able to actually fix the house. Our chimney is crumbling, which keeps us from using our more energy efficient wood stove. Water damage to our ceiling has led to mold in our bedroom. And the lack of insulation means our pipes freeze if we aren't careful. We feel like the dream of being a homeowner was a trick. We have to spend all our time, money, and energy keeping the house together. It's an insurmountable weight that just keeps on building.

Access to publicly-funded home repair would dramatically improve our lives and our local environment. Instead of feeling overwhelmed all the time, we could actually enjoy our home and be more present for our community. We could make much-needed repairs that would make our home healthier and more energy efficient. When we eventually have children, we would be able to spend more time with them and would be less worried about our house being safe. And we would be creating good jobs for our neighbors who work in construction and home repair.

Access to green spaces is equally important for overall well-being, particularly in urban environments. Green spaces often encourage physical exercise, community gatherings, and time for peaceful reflection. A summary of the available research has shown "strong evidence for significant positive associations between the quantity of green space...and perceived mental health and all-cause mortality."²³ Ensuring that every Pennsylvanian – no matter their zip code or socio-economic status – has access to quality green spaces needs to be a key consideration of all future land use decisions.

Climate Resilient Infrastructure

The Biden Administration proposed a significant investment in infrastructure and public assets that are critical for future economic growth. Estimates from the American Society of Civil Engineers indicate that without substantial investment in our nation's infrastructure, the nation will lose out on \$10 trillion in GDP and 3 million jobs by 2039.²⁴ Pennsylvania has 3,353 bridges and 7,540 miles of highway in poor condition.²⁵ Local economies have also been impacted by deteriorating inland waterways, and road, culvert, and bridge infrastructure failure and collapses, leading to delays for transportation vehicles traveling through the state. These problems hurt small businesses and hardworking Pennsylvania families. This proposal establishes a Civilian Climate Corps, which will revitalize communities across the nation with robust jobs through climate-smart agriculture and conservation, coastal restoration and forestry programs. Additionally, it creates a Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator that will direct 40% of its clean energy technology investments to underserved communities on the frontlines of climate change.

The American Society of Civil Engineers rated Pennsylvania's stormwater infrastructure as poor, giving the Commonwealth a grade of "D."²⁶ In general, our stormwater management systems are aging, inadequate, and underfunded. Poorly managed stormwater will become an even greater threat in the face of a changing climate with more frequent and intense storm events. As we experience powerful storms from increasing flash flood events to events like Hurricane Ida, it's critical that communities have systems in place to capture and manage heavy precipitation.

²³ van den Berg, M., Wendel-Vos, W., van Poppel, M., Kemper, H., van Mechelen, W., Maas, J., "[Health benefits of green spaces in the living environment: A systematic review of epidemiological studies](#)", *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* Vol. 14, Issue 4, pp 806-816 (November 6, 2015)

²⁴ American Society of Civil Engineers, "[Investment Gap 2020-2029](#)" (2021)

²⁵ The White House, "[The American Jobs Plan Fact Sheet](#)", (April 2021)

²⁶ Pennsylvania State Council of the American Society of Civil Engineers, "[2018 Report Card for Pennsylvania's Infrastructure 2018](#)" (2018)

Green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), such as rain gardens, trees, and permeable surfaces, is a nature-based solution to the water quality issues that stormwater runoff causes and provides greater benefits than conventional stormwater solutions. GSI utilizes soil-water-plant systems that intercept stormwater, infiltrate a portion of it into the ground, evaporate a portion of it into the air, and in some cases release a portion of it slowly back into the sewer system. In addition to better stormwater management practices and improved water quality, GSI provides benefits such as beautified communities, improved public health, expanded ecological habitats, and enhanced local economic vitality.

The Importance of Public Transportation

Too often, the lack of accessible resources within communities across our state forces residents to travel far for basic needs like food, household supplies, and employment. Particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, Pennsylvanians rely on public transportation to meet these needs. Unfortunately, for much of the Commonwealth, public transportation is either unreliable or nonexistent, placing an undue burden on residents that don't own cars.

Improving access to public transportation will protect the air quality near residences, reduce traffic in urban areas, and provide more mobility options. And by connecting communities to public transportation hubs through trails and improved multimodal corridors, we can ensure that public transportation becomes reliable, convenient, and safe for all riders. We can do even more to protect our families' health by transitioning to modes of public transit that use clean energy. These connections between quality, affordable housing, responsible land use policies, and equitable access to public transit demonstrate the need for comprehensive housing and land use planning, especially as Pennsylvania's population grows.

Policy Solutions

- Publicly fund affordable, healthy homes through home repairs, lead and asbestos abatements, and weatherization/electrification programs in environmental justice communities. Include strong tenant protections against displacement and rent increases, so that the state does not inadvertently harm tenants while making the housing stock healthier and more resilient. Use these programs to build out a workforce of energy and air quality auditors and other unionized green jobs.
- Enact comprehensive inclusionary zoning and land use plans that address climate resilience, such as incentivizing conservation and transit-oriented development, public transportation, bike lanes, and greenway trails in land use planning to reduce sprawl and the negative environmental and social impacts of auto-dependent land use policy.
- Utilize Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funds to support pedestrian, biking, and public transportation infrastructure. Examples include adequate LED street lighting, ADA accessible curbs, bus shelters with seating, proper street signage, and working crossing signals.
- Establish statewide benchmarking and building performance standards and regularly update building codes.
- Achieve 30x30 – conserving and protecting at least 30% of PA's lands by the year 2030. Ensuring that lands are protected to promote critical habitat conservation, cultural heritage and nature based economic development through fully funding and programming PA DCNR's eight Conservation Landscapes across the state and providing for the acquisitions and management of additional networks of Conservation Landscapes.
- Support smart land-use legislation that identifies green infrastructure corridors and methods to protect them.
- Ensure that all affordable housing funded by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency is built to a net zero standard.
- Require all municipalities to accept their fair share of affordable housing by supporting statewide inclusionary zoning legislation.
- Local governments and the PA Department of Transportation need to evaluate, rank, and prioritize infrastructure projects, ensuring adequate lighting, shelter, and road conditions.
- Provide municipalities and state agencies grant programs and incentives to prioritize green stormwater infrastructure over traditional systems.
- Restore funding to Act 167 (Stormwater Management Act) planning efforts to ensure counties and municipalities have ordinances based on local watersheds.
- Provide incentives and protections for riparian forested buffers, or streamside trees, a cost-effective way to improve stream health. Establish minimum standards with additional requirements given to lands adjacent to special protection waterways and allow municipalities to create local ordinances.
- Use federal funding to support weatherization, repair, and energy efficiency projects for public schools.²⁷

²⁷ The White House, "[Federal Resources for Addressing School Infrastructure Needs](#)", (April 2022)

ENSURING LABOR RIGHTS IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

As Pennsylvanians are recovering from a global pandemic, we need a green energy economy that encourages a living wage on a living planet. Workers in this new economy should also have access to a union and a voice in the workplace.

Pennsylvania has an opportunity to play a key role in the global transition to clean, green energy. Right now, Pennsylvania contributes 1% of the global emissions that are causing climate change.²⁸ As the global economy and markets change, Pennsylvania must make sure that workers are ready, trained, and guaranteed the right to unionize. All Pennsylvanians deserve the right to organize in fair union elections, and to be protected from employers who violate worker's rights and exploit workers through loopholes, particularly in new and emerging industries.



As we transition to a clean energy economy, we must ensure these communities and their workers are prioritized for the economic benefits of new, good-paying, union jobs. Pennsylvania must empower workers to access green jobs across the energy sector...

Corporate polluters have a history in Pennsylvania of leaving economically and environmentally devastated communities in their wake after they have used up their resources. As we transition to a clean energy economy, we must ensure these communities and their workers are prioritized for the economic benefits of new, good-paying, union jobs. Pennsylvania must empower workers to access green jobs across the energy sector; from jobs in green stormwater infrastructure initiatives, to electric vehicle manufacturing and charging station build-out, to advancements in clean public transportation.

Policy Solutions

- Spend Pennsylvania's federal appropriations from the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act equitably:
 - Pennsylvania agencies should publicly track federal investments to provide accountability that state agencies receiving federal funds are distributing those funds by looking through a new, updated lens for workers and new workforce programs that considers emerging industries and workforces and promoting unionization in those new sectors;
 - Instruct state agencies to actively pursue investments of federal dollars in disinvested communities and workers;
 - Create a public database to track where investments are going and who is getting state contracts to complete the work that includes both material procurement and workforce recruitment.
- Prevailing wage laws must be expanded for any project that uses any form of government funding while also encouraging and respecting labor agreements between unions.
- Increase the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and repeal minimum wage preemption that causes disparities in economic conditions across the state.
- Promote more workforce development and hands on training programs and opportunities for those entering or reentering the workforce (e.g. alternative energy, eco-tourism).

²⁸ Brian X. McCrone, "[Pa. Power Plants Need to Start Paying for Emissions. Here's the Benefits and Costs](#)", *NBC10 Philadelphia* (April 25, 2022)



- Work with the Department of Labor to ensure that diverse workforces and subcontractors are hired and promoted to increase the likelihood of a level playing field through strong policies.
- Ensure federal well plugging and mine reclamation funding goes to Pennsylvania pro-union employers and do the same with federal investments in other sectors like water, electric vehicle, and other investments.
- Incentivize renewable energy jobs – and promote unionization in these new jobs – to expand in Pennsylvania by providing necessary tax credits and subsidies that are similarly afforded to the fossil fuel industry.
- Provide equitable access to infrastructure and transportation by utilizing IIJA funding and recreating a sustainable version of Act 89 to increase the availability for workers to access jobs.
- Develop training programs, and/or establish a 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps, that provide the skills to install and maintain conservation and natural infrastructure.
- Make sure workers from the fossil fuel industry have first chance at green jobs while strongly pushing for unionization through requiring incentives like labor project agreements and paying union scale wage rates.
- Fully implement the Biden Administration’s Justice40 principles²⁹ in Pennsylvania by ensuring that 40% of economic investments in workers and industries go to environmental justice communities.

LABOR



Helen Burke
Erie County

My name is Helen Burke. I’m from Edinboro, in Erie County, and now I live in Lake City. I work as a home healthcare attendant, I’m a member of SEIU Healthcare, and I consider myself an environmentalist. The work I do is important, but my industry doesn’t pay enough to attract enough people. That’s a problem because my community doesn’t have many real jobs here anymore where people can earn a living and stay until retirement age.

Having good-paying green jobs would be a huge help for both of those problems. Young people could have a career doing something like installing solar panels, which would help our community be more energy efficient. Those green jobs would help lower our poverty rates and create a new middle class. In the meantime, the pay in my sector would increase both because people would have more to pay and because the jobs would need to be competitive. People like my brother, who works in a union foundry now, could have jobs that pay as well but are safer and healthier. These protections would transform our local economy and make sure parents could provide for their families.

²⁹ The White House, “[The Path to Achieving Justice40](#)” (July 20, 2021)

PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY MEANS PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT



Functional, reflective, and equitable civic processes are integral to a well-functioning democratic society. However, according to a 2020 study, Pennsylvania ranks 32nd in the nation for ease of access to voting and has been consistently considered one of the most gerrymandered states.^{30, 31} Despite already lagging behind other states in terms of access, independence, and equity, there have been increased efforts since 2020 to further endanger our democratic practices. From rolling back voting rights and access, to politicizing election administration, to destroying judicial independence, many of the elements that make up Pennsylvania's democracy are at risk.

Much like pollution, anti-democracy policies often harm Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income communities the most. These communities have been traditionally left out of the democratic process and stand to be significantly disenfranchised by further restrictions. And without fair representation for the voices of those most impacted by environmental inaction, we will struggle to advance the policies we need around clean air and water, climate justice, and renewable energy.

We know that a majority of Pennsylvania voters support action on critical environmental issues like climate change. In order to ensure fair representation, equitable access, robust civic engagement, and environmental policies that reflect the will of the voters, we need to fight anti-democracy measures and advocate for pro-voter reforms. While the environmental community may not be able to match the fossil fuel industry dollar for dollar, as long as we have a fair and functioning democracy, we can ensure the voices of the majority who want action on environmental issues are heard.

There is significant room for pro-voter reforms which would empower more Pennsylvanians, particularly those who have been historically disenfranchised, to make their voices heard – however, we most often see attempts to roll back voting rights. Despite the incredible success of Act 77, which launched voting by mail in Pennsylvania, there are currently proposals to eliminate it. There are also proposals to establish voter ID laws, which have been proven to disenfranchise BIPOC and low-income voters. Another proposal would gerrymander and politicize our state courts by establishing geographically-based judicial districts, guaranteeing that key environmental issues like the Environmental Rights Amendment will be administered and adjudicated inequitably. And although the results of the 2020 election have been certified as accurate, there have been repeated attempts to audit and invalidate them.

These threats must be met with firm resistance from the Governor and legislature. We encourage gubernatorial and legislative candidates to adopt and pass policy solutions to ensure our democracy is one that is fair and equitable – supporting and advocating for voting rights legislation and initiatives that protect and expand the right to vote for all Pennsylvanians.



³⁰ Schraufnagel, S., Pomante, M. J., and Li, Q., "[Cost of Voting in the American States: 2020](#)", *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* (Dec 2020)

³¹ Royden, L., and Li, M., "[Extreme Maps](#)", *Brennan Center for Justice* (2017)

Policy Solutions

- Advocate for and support pro-voter legislation that improves access to and properly funds our elections.³²
- Defend against legislative attempts to roll back voting rights and access, including attempts to eliminate voting by mail, institute voter ID requirements, or otherwise weaken our democratic processes.
- Enact same day voter registration to encourage registration when residents are at their most engaged and to enable real-time corrections to inaccurate voter rolls.
- Enact automatic voter registration which would send eligible residents registration information when they interact with various government programs, dramatically expanding the voting pool and ensuring more accurate records.
- Enact reforms that would allow for early in-person voting, which would relieve crowding at the polls on Election Day and ensure equitable access by empowering those who work difficult schedules or have family care commitments to vote whenever works best for them.
- Ensure all Pennsylvania counties have adequate polling locations and vote-by-mail drop boxes.
- Improve new vote by mail laws to allow for a cure process and pre-canvassing. Pre-canvassing would allow counties to start counting ballots before Election Day and a cure process would allow for voters who make simple mistakes on their ballot to fix them so their votes are counted.
- Increase funding for safe, secure, and efficient elections. County election departments must be properly resourced, particularly so they can invest in new technology like electronic poll books which help ensure accuracy and security.
- Improve language access at the polls so all voters can access ballots and instructions in their own language.
- Ensure that eligible current and former incarcerated citizens are informed of their right to vote. For example, pass policies that will require county jails in the state to have consistent and universal procedures for voter registration, voting by mail, and voter education and outreach.³³
- Change the current structure of legislative committees to ensure no one party can halt bills from coming to the full legislature for a vote.
- Protect the independence of Pennsylvania's judiciary by opposing legislation that would gerrymander our courts through a ballot initiative.

DEMOCRACY



John Santana
Lehigh County

My name is John Santana, I'm from Allentown, and I'm a rising senior at East Stroudsburg University. Going away to college in a place with cleaner air made me realize just how polluted it is back home in Allentown – you can barely even see the stars. But many people in my community can't choose elected officials that will fight for them to have cleaner air and water because there are so many barriers to them voting in the first place.

Allentown has a high percentage of Spanish speakers, including my parents. Without language access, it's hard for them to even know who is running let alone what they stand for. As a result, most of my family never paid attention to politics until I got involved with groups like Make the Road in high school. That's when I noticed how hard it is for working class people like my parents and most of my neighbors to vote. For example, my mom runs a daycare. Many schools are closed on election day, so it's one of the busiest work days for her and nearly impossible to go vote.

Reforms to make voting easier – from increased language access to adding vote-by-mail drop boxes – would help even the playing field for communities like mine. We could give input about what really matters to us, like having cleaner air and purer water, and see who really aligns with our needs. Voting itself would be more community-oriented instead of individualistic. We could go together, we could have more discussion about it. Our community deserves a stronger democracy that will bring about a healthier, more equitable environment.

³² An example of pro-voter legislation is the K. Leroy Irvis Voting Rights Protection Act (House Bill 2090) from Representative Joanna McClinton in the 2021-2022 legislative session.

³³ All Voting Is Local, Committee of Seventy, and Common Cause, [“Ballots for All: Holding Pennsylvania County Jails Accountable for Providing Ballot Access”](#) (2021)

QUALITY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

As California's Superintendent of San Mateo County Schools, Ms. Campbell, espoused, environmental education allows students to see "relevance of their classroom studies to the complex environmental issues confronting our planet and they can acquire the skills they'll need to be creative problem solvers and powerful advocates."³⁴

This type of school program benefits students, schools, and our larger world in a variety of ways. First, it improves academic achievement. Environmental education improves test scores by providing students with engaging lessons about the natural world that can be applied to all subject areas and grades. It emphasizes skills essential for succeeding in tomorrow's world, such as questioning, investigating, defining problems, analyzing, interpreting, reasoning, developing conclusions, and solving problems. Environmental education also supports science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by offering an engaging platform for gaining and applying knowledge and skills.³⁵



In addition to academics, incorporating the environment into K-12 education has demonstrable effects on students' physical and mental health. Spending time outdoors is an antidote to the plugged-in lives of today's generation.

In addition to academics, incorporating the environment into K-12 education has demonstrable effects on students' physical and mental health. Spending time outdoors is an antidote to the plugged-in lives of today's generation. Children who experience school grounds or play areas with diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of good nutrition, more creative, and less prone to depression.³⁶ Children with attention-deficit disorder also benefit from more exposure to nature—the greener a child's everyday environment, the more manageable their symptoms.³⁷

But none of these benefits are within reach, as Pennsylvania's schools lack the funding they need for even the most basic resources. Schools across the state are struggling on a daily basis with understaffing and crumbling buildings. The first step toward attaining the many benefits of environmental education is to properly fund public schools. Then, by appointing a Secretary of Education that understands the potential of incorporating place-based environmental learning into our curriculum, Pennsylvania students can deepen their relationship with their own environment and with each other.

The future of Pennsylvania, this country, and this world will be left to today's students. Actions taken today by leaders, teachers, advocates, and parents will dictate what type of world these children are left with. We encourage the Governor and the legislature to invest in dynamic educational opportunities and safe places to learn for all of Pennsylvania's children so that they can be ready today to meet tomorrow's challenges.

³⁴ Project Learning Tree, "[Why Environmental Education Is Important](#)", (2022)

³⁵ North American Association for Environmental Education, "[The Benefits of Environmental Education for K–12 Students](#)", (2022)

³⁶ Charles, C., and Louv, R., "[Wild Hope: The Transformative Power of Children Engaging with Nature](#)", *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature* pp 395-415 (March 10, 2020)

³⁷ Kuo, F. E., Taylor, A. F. "[A potential natural treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: evidence from a national study](#)." *American Journal of Public Health* (2004)

Policy Solutions

- Increase K-12 education funding so schools have the resources they need to implement an environmental curriculum.
- Support the updated PA Integrated Standards for Science, Environment and Ecology (Grades 6-12), which will provide a cohesive K-12 integrated approach to science, environment and ecology education in Pennsylvania.
- Implement place-based environmental curriculum, using Maryland's Environmental Literacy Standards as a guide.³⁸
- Appoint a Secretary of Education that values environmental education as part of the K-12 curriculum.
- Use federal investments to retrofit school buildings for energy efficiency and weatherization, and make the environmental connection for students between these improvements and the quality of education.



EDUCATION



Rashida Lovely
Lackawanna County

My name is Rashida Lovely. I'm a small business owner, a scientist, a parent, and an environmentalist in Scranton. For the last 5 years, I have run afterschool and summer programs for kids to get connected to the environment all around them. My kids come from disenfranchised communities, where environmental racism means green space can be harder to find and there isn't easy access to transportation. So we make sure to connect to the environment all around us. We clean up our neighborhood, we head down to the Lackawanna River, we grow food in our community garden, and we of course eat that food. Anything we can do to connect to the ground and put our hands in the dirt.

After the kids I work with access this program and begin the process of connecting to their environment, I notice a huge change in them. They are more connected to their own personal health, their diets change, they're excited to eat vegetables that they grew themselves.

Expanding place-based environmental programs like these to children across the commonwealth by making them part of public education would be incredibly transformative. For years, environmental education has been seen as a luxury and hasn't been a priority in poor or urban school districts. But removing barriers for thousands of kids to connect with the environment in their day to day lives would improve their mental and physical health, and it also strengthens local economies by investing in the local ecosystem.

³⁸ Maryland State Department of Education, "[Environmental Literacy](#)", (2022)

APPENDIX I: EXPERT LIST

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