

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224



February 23, 2017

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We are writing to urge you to take advantage of the opportunity presented by vacancies in the Public Service Commission (PSC) to appoint “People’s Commissioners” committed to energy democracy and to serving the interests of the people and environment of New York State. At the grassroots level, we are working to enact a just and participatory transition to a resilient, localized, and democratically controlled clean energy economy in New York State, and are inspired by elements of the Reforming the Energy Vision (REV) strategy that move New York State in that direction. At a time when the federal leadership denies climate change and is moving our nation backwards toward a dangerous and exploitive fossil fuel economy, action at the state level to create model renewable, sustainable, and equitable energy systems and economies is more critical than ever. We stand ready to support you in appointing commissioners who will make REV R.E.A.L.: Renewable, Equitable, Affordable and Local.

While the REV process sets some ambitious goals for moving to a renewable energy system that serves all New Yorkers, the results on the ground have been significantly less than expected. According to the latest Solar Foundation report, New York lost 800 solar installation jobs in the industry in 2016, and unofficial industry estimates show 2016 deployment level with that of 2015, after 300 percent growth over the previous two years. To date, only 1-2 community shared solar projects have gone on-line more than 18 months into the program, and the current Value of Distributed Energy Resources (VDER) proposal before the Commission threatens to erect another barrier to solar access for most New Yorkers. This is due, in part, to undue influence of corporate utilities and energy companies on the REV process, the PSC’s narrow, market-based approach, and the institutional biases of energy policymakers whose approach to energy solutions was shaped by long careers at the world’s biggest banks. We need all constituents’ voices at the table. The broader goals of the REV process, and of the majority of New Yorkers, would be best served by a Public Service Commission that represents the people and the environment of New York State, rather than those with vested interests in outdated energy systems.

The vacancies in the PSC present an opportunity to broaden the vision and capacities of this important body. To this end, we call on you to appoint and hold accountable People’s Commissioners to the PSC that are committed to working for the benefit of the people and the environment of New York State. Such Commissioners would prioritize clean, democratically controlled energy solutions. They would represent the people of the state, especially the poor and working class communities and communities of color that have borne the greatest burdens of our dirty energy economy, and have been largely excluded from the benefits of new, renewable energy systems. They would also represent workers, possess renewable energy expertise, and ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of income, race, or geography, benefit from the transition to a renewable energy economy. The Energy Democracy Alliance and its allies stand ready to work with you to support the appointment and confirmation of such commissioners.

As you look to fill the three open Public Service Commissioner positions, we urge you to ensure these core qualities and competencies are represented on the Commission:

1. Clear vision for how we can achieve our ambitious efficiency and renewable energy goals, and the leadership ability to move the state purposefully towards them without fear of disrupting old systems and practices;
2. Proven commitment to the rights of marginalized populations that have been most severely impacted by our energy system and climate change, including poor and working class communities and communities of color, are part of a just transition to a renewable energy economy;
3. A demonstrated understanding of renewable energy technologies and the strategies needed to accommodate their widespread adoption and connection to the grid;
4. Active support for a REV process that is Renewable, Equitable, Affordable, and Local (REAL)
5. Commitment to water remaining a public good, and the creation and maintenance of water systems that keep our water clean and healthy;
6. Commitment to addressing the digital divide created by unequal access to high speed internet and affordable telecommunications service;
7. A sense of urgency based on the clear threat posed by climate change to the survival of our society, complemented by a commitment to rigorous, factually-based analysis and action;
8. A record of supporting energy affordability, consumer protections, and community ownership of renewable energy resources;
9. Skill in building consensus across difference and a commitment to including underrepresented stakeholders in Commission decision-making;
10. A proven track record of supporting workers' rights to collective bargaining, a living wage, safe working conditions, and a voice and/or ownership stake in the workplace;
11. No conflicts of interest through investments, board commitments, past lobbying, and a proactive approach to ensuring transparency in the PSC and its practices.

The Public Service Commission can play a critical role in ensuring the many benefits of clean, renewable energy systems are accessible to communities most impacted by climate change and energy burdens. To that end, new appointments must broaden the perspective of the overall Commission to ensure its attention to energy democracy and its effectiveness to moving towards bold, transformative outcomes.

Sincerely,

Jessica Azulay
Program Director
Alliance for a Green Economy

Adam Flint
Program Manager, Southern Tier Solar Works
Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition

Amber Johnson
Community Organizer
Citizen Action of New York

Barbara J. Warren, RN, MS
Executive Director

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Lynn Benander
President and CEO
Co-op Power, Inc.

Irene Weiser
Cordinator
Fossil Free Tompkins

Ceci Pineda
Resiliency Training & Policy Coordinator
GOLES

Ms. Gale Lyons
Mothers Out Front

Bob Rossi
Executive Director
New York State Sustainable Business Council

Jonathan Bix
Executive Director
Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson

Claude Copeland
Faith-based Energy Organizer
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition

Clarke Gocker
Director of Policy and Strategy
PUSH Buffalo

Kim Fraczek
Co-Director
Sane Energy Project

Kelly Roache
Business Development Manager
Solstice

Richard Riseling
Founder and former Executive Director
Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development

Gwen Chaffin
Community Organizer
Syracuse United Neighbors