

PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

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Environmental Rights Amendment Passes in New York

Constitutional Amendment will give every New Yorker a right to clean air & water, & a healthful environment

Albany, NY – Yesterday, voters in New York overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the State Constitution that would add “Each person shall have a right to clean air and water, and a healthful environment.” Passing this amendment has made New York just the third state in the U.S. to recognize protecting environmental rights as an inalienable right.

Quotes in reaction to the Environmental Right passing:

“The rights of all people and generations to clean water and air, and a healthful environment needs to be at the foundation of all good government action that affects the environment. This constitutional amendment will ensure that whenever government acts, the environmental benefits and ramifications will be among the elements given highest priority in the decision-making process with a focus on preventing pollution rather than simply permitting it. New York is on the cutting edge of the new national movement that seeks to secure highest constitutional recognition and protection of environmental rights. Communities and states across the nation who are part of the national Green Amendment movement have been watching New York closely; I am delighted that this success will provide them all the inspiration they need to seek and secure their own meaningful rights to a clean and healthy environment like New Yorkers now have,” said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and also Founder of the national Green Amendments For The Generations. “Now that New York has this right, it is time to put it to best use for the people and our environment,” van Rossum added.

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“The Labor Movement proudly supported passage of Proposal 2. Today’s victory means all New Yorkers will now be guaranteed the right to a healthy and clean environment. It will also lead to good union jobs as a result of investments in clean drinking water projects, improvements to wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, and the development of new energy technologies,” said Mario Cilento, President of the New York State AFL-CIO.

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“From the streets of New York City to the hamlets of the Adirondack Park, the people of New York have voted for a future with clean air and water. This historic decision ensures that New Yorkers and the public lands and waters we enjoy are protected from pollution and other environmental harms for generations to come.” – Michael Barrett, ADK Executive Director.

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“The passage of the Environmental Rights Amendment in our State Constitution is a monumental victory for the citizens of New York State,” said Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper Executive Director Jill Jedlicka. “Through a true act of self-governance, we the citizens of New York have given ourselves the right to breathe clean air and have access to clean water. We have also gained a critical tool to be able to hold those accountable who may threaten the health of our communities or seek to violate this fundamental right.”

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The right to clean air, clean water, and a healthful environment is an undeniable human right. The addition of Prop #2 to our constitution represents New Yorkers’ desire for this right, but the real task ahead is to ensure every New Yorker can realize the full extent of this promise—access to clean air, clean water, and the enjoyment of a healthful environment. Thank you to the countless people and organizations who have done the work done to secure this right in our state constitution. Here’s to the work ahead that will be supported through this victory! – Taylor Jaffe, Environmental Justice Coordinator, Catskill Mountainkeeper

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“New Yorkers made their voices heard: clean air, clean water, and a healthful environment is now a constitutional right,” said Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “For too long our environment has been treated as a luxury item, and as a result, water supplies have been contaminated by dangerous chemicals and millions of New Yorkers are exposed to harmful air pollution. Adding those 15 words to the New York State Constitution’s Bill of Rights is monumental and will have countless benefits to public health and our environment for generations to come. Now every New Yorker, regardless of race, zip code or tax bracket, has the fundamental right to clean air and clean water.”

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“It’s always been clear that a strong majority of the people of New York want clean air and clean water. Their right to that is too often thwarted by powerful special interest polluters. Earthjustice and advocate partners who have been fighting for a healthy and clean environment for decades are excited that we now have this new constitutional right,” said Courtney Bowie, Managing Attorney of the Earthjustice Northeast Office. “We look forward to working with our allies in bringing the words on paper to life!”

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“New Yorkers have spoken very clearly on making clean air and clean water a legal right. In these otherwise polarizing times, a healthy environment, breathing clear air and drinking clean water are values that bring people together,” said Peter Iwanowicz, Executive Director at Environmental Advocates NY and leader in the ‘Vote YES for Clean Air and Water’ coalition.

“No matter what we look like, where we come from, or how much money we have, as New Yorkers we now have constitutionally protected environmental rights. That’s an important step, one we need our Governor and Legislature to build on in 2022 through major climate legislation.” – Jonathan Bix, Executive Director, For the Many

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“The League of Women Voters of New York State is pleased that voters have approved Proposal 2 to guarantee all New Yorkers the right to clean air, clean water, and a healthful environment. The League has long supported environmental justice policies to protect communities from pollution and hazardous living conditions. This new amendment will create an outlet for individuals and organizations to take action against bad actors who violate our new right to clean air and water. We applaud the Vote YES for Clean Air and Water coalition for their hard work in encouraging voters to approve this amendment.” – Jennifer Wilson, Deputy Director, League of Women Voters of New York State

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Clean air and clean water are the most basic of human rights. It’s terrific that New Yorkers recognized that and voted YES to enshrine them in the Bill of Rights of the NY State Constitution. Now, every state should follow the lead of New York, Montana, and Pennsylvania – because all Americans deserve clean air, water, and a healthful environment! – Natalie Polvere and Iris Hiskey Arno, Co-chairs, Environment Committee, NYCD16 Indivisible

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“Everyone who values living in a place that doesn’t make us sick now has another tool in our toolbox to force better decision making from our government to combat the foul and ongoing legacy of continued environmental racism. New Yorkers have overwhelmingly embraced clean air and clean water for everyone, now is the time for everyone else—from business to elected leaders—to do the same.” – Eddie Bautista, Executive Director, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA)

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“As nurses, we herald the constitutional right to clean air and clean water as fundamental to the public’s health. We will join communities across the state in seeking clean air measures and enforcement, knowing that air pollution is a terrible killer. Protecting our water now and into the future is also a paramount priority. Raising a clean environment to the level of state constitutional right is a great victory for the people.” – New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) President Nancy Hagans, RN

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“Today New Yorkers have made history by voting to amend our state constitution to give every resident the right to clean water, clean air, and a healthy environment. With this amendment, a new pathway has been created for New Yorkers to use the law to conserve the existing natural environment, repair ecological damage, and reverse concerning trends,” said Joan Leary Matthews, Interim Senior Director for Water Initiatives at NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council).

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“The voters have spoken: Access to clean air and water should not be determined by someone’s zip code. Prop 2 is a win and an additional legal tool for historically overburdened environmental justice communities fighting to breathe easier” said Jenny Veloz, Community Organizer at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

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“Mother Nature is surely smiling today as voters created a victory for clean air and water in New York State. There are so many people who have labored to make this amendment to the Bill of Rights a reality – from our legislators in Albany to environmental activists on the ground. But we owe special gratitude to Environmental Advocates NY, who shepherded this major milestone from concept to reality.” – Bob Dandrew, Co-Founder of Partners for Climate Action Hudson Valley

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“The right to clean air and clean water for all people and wildlife is something that we believe deeply in. That’s why at Save the Sound we use both science and the law to fight pollution. This right’s inclusion in the state constitution shows that New York voters understand that all of us are responsible for eliminating pollution, and reminds us all to keep striving for a future with bright skies and clear water.” – Bill Lucey, Soundkeeper, Save the Sound

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