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New Jersey Activists, Legislators, & Residents Gather to Urge Public Hearing on Amending the State Constitution to Grant Environmental Rights

Trenton, NJ: New Jersey justice organizers, legislators, environmental leaders, and local residents gathered to urge the state legislature to grant a hearing for the proposed New Jersey Green Amendment (ACR72/SCR15), which will constitutionally recognize and protect peoples' environmental rights in the state. The proposed Green Amendment would add the right to clean air, pure water, and a healthy environment to the Bill of Rights in the NJ State Constitution.

First proposed almost 5 years ago in 2017, the NJ Green Amendment has gained bi-partisan support across the legislature, with 60 legislative sponsors currently signed on. Despite the bill's 60 bi-partisan cosponsors and outward support from the public, the NJ legislature has not held a hearing for the Amendment in nearly four years. At the one hearing held in 2018 before the Senate Environment Committee, the bill passed with a bi-partisan supermajority vote of committee members (4 committee members voted yes with one abstention).

"Denying the people of New Jersey an opportunity to testify on the proposed Green Amendment is patently unfair and betrays the right of the people to determine how they wish to be governed. The state constitution belongs to the people and lays out their goals and priorities for government. Clean water and air, a stable climate, and healthy environments are inalienable human rights that should be entitled to constitutional protection. It's time for the legislature to let the people be heard on whether they want their inalienable rights to a clean, safe and healthy environment to be entitled to constitutional recognition and protection," stated **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper, founder of the national Green Amendments For The Generations movement, and author of the book The Green Amendment, The People's Fight for a Clean, Safe and Healthy Environment**.

"Over the last few years, New Jersey has established a reputation for enacting bold, justice-centered policies that equitably safeguard the health of all New Jerseyans," said **Senate prime sponsor Linda Greenstein (D-Mercer/Middlesex)**. "The Green Amendment is a tremendous way to further accomplish that mission. With the passage of this bill, New Jersey would be set to continue blazing the trail, enshrining in our State Constitution the right to clean air and water for all residents."

"New Jersey is a national leader in environmental protection. We have been at the forefront of protecting wetlands, advancing the strongest environmental justice bill nationwide, putting forth the first and strongest PFAS protections in the nation, and yet we still face serious environmental protection and equity issues across our state," added **Assembly prime sponsor John McKeon (D-Essex)**. NJ should be leading the way on passage of a constitutional Green Amendment to ensure we raise the bar to protect the rights of present and future generations to the basic fundamentals of a

healthy, safe and happy life – clean water and air, a stable climate and healthy environments. I, for one, would like the people of New Jersey to have the opportunity to testify and tell their elected officials, myself included, on whether they would like their constitution amended to protect environmental rights. I am a prime sponsor of the NJ Green Amendment and here today because I want our state to continue to lead the way with a legacy of environmental protection and champion a constitutional right to a clean, safe and healthy environment.”

“If NJ State's legislature fails to grant the people of NJ a hearing for the Green Amendment, it would be a slap in the face of environmental justice (EJ) leaders and organizations state-wide. We represent EJ communities throughout the state and it would not fare well with our numerous EJ partners and our network of over 100,000 members. The right to clean water and air has been moving at the pace of a snail. Once again, New Jersey is left behind vs trailblazing and setting or joining national trends. Assemblymember Englebright (NYC) started later and got it done sooner than New Jersey. What's our hold-up in New Jersey? It is past time to step up in New Jersey. Our legislature and the people of New Jersey deserve to have their voices heard now,” **said Terrance Bankston, NJ Environmental Justice organizer, Clean Water Action.**

“A Green Amendment seeks to secure a constitutional right to pure water, clean air, a stable climate, and a healthy environment for all residents (including future generations) irrespective of what zip code one lives in. Proud to be a sponsor of SCR15,” stated **Senate co-prime sponsor Andrew Zwicker (D-Middlesex/Mercer/Somerset).**

“The struggle to save our planet will be the defining challenge of not only our own lifetimes, but our children’s lifetimes and their children’s. The Green Amendment is a reasonable measure that will protect New Jersey’s public natural resources and ecosystems and enshrine into our Constitution the right to a clean and healthy environment, including pure water and clean air,” continued **Assembly co-prime sponsor Raj Mukherji (D-Hudson).**

“I am here today to champion the rights of all New Jerseyans to have the chance to weigh in on whether they want a constitutional right to a clean, safe and healthy environment. The Green Amendment precludes governmental action absent a reasonable effort to address the environmental effects of development, and does so without sacrificing constitutionally-protected property rights. It recognizes the State’s duty to conserve, protect, and maintain our natural resources, tempered by legitimate development to improve upon the lot of the citizenry, especially those who need a safe, affordable place to call home. It does so with common sense and without frivolous lawsuits. That's the right balance, and it can't happen quickly enough”, said **Assembly co-sponsor Mila Jasey (D-Essex).**

“Just as the League of Women Voters of New Jersey believes that everyone has a fundamental right to the vote, we believe that everyone has a fundamental right to clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment,” said **Melissa Marks, League of Women Voters of New Jersey Community Organizer.** “The Green Amendment is an opportunity for New Jersey to draw a line in the sand – to grant its residents a fundamental right to breathe clean air. We stand with our allies across the state calling on legislative leadership to step up and move this important measure forward.”

“We here in Newark know the environment and public health are not partisan issues. It is neither conservative nor liberal, but it's certainly right, to limit government's infringement on people's rights, including the right to breathe clean air and drink clean water, and that's what this bill does, let's get it done!” added **Kim Gaddy, founder, South Ward Environmental Alliance and National Environmental Justice Director, Clean Water Action**.

"Environmental rights are never a given and a Green Amendment can help fill in gaps in the law while protecting against new threats to our air, water and climate. There is a massive supermajority of support from New Jerseyans for the Green Amendment because environmental protection is a bedrock principle for the public -- now we need to get it into the State Constitution," said **Doug O'Malley, Director of Environment New Jersey**.

“Given New Jersey’s particularly prolonged entanglement in slavery, poverty and corruption-at this moment in 2022, New Jersey leaders have a duty and a choice for its people: ensure environmental racism is met with solutions that are preventative and rooted in legal grounding for the benefit of all New Jerseyans or the status quo,” stated **Rachel Dawn Davis, Public Policy & Justice Organizer with Waterspirit**. “The right to clean air, clean water, a stable climate and healthy environment for future generations remains apolitical, as evidenced by ACR72/SCR15’s bipartisan co-sponsorship. Hearing and advancing such policy reform today which prevents pollution to the most overburdened areas of concern in this state for generations to come will complement the environmental justice law rules presently going into effect.”

Bridget Brady, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator with the Delaware Riverkeeper Network offers, “up and down the Delaware River, New Jerseyans enjoy the river for boating, fishing, bird watching, swimming; there are businesses throughout the region that depend on the river staying clean and healthy; there are people who are working to ensure our river and environment is protected for present and future generations. When the Delaware Riverkeeper Network is out in the field doing our work, advocating and litigating for the River we hear one consistent remark: given 5 years of opportunity, it’s past time for New Jersey’s legislative leadership to let the people have their say about the idea of constitutional environmental rights. Let the people be heard!”

The **Reverend Charles Loflin, Executive Director of Unitarian Universalist Faith Action of NJ**, notes: "As Unitarian Universalists we believe that every person has a right to a clean and healthy environment, including pure water, clean air, and ecologically healthy habitats. Our current laws have proven inadequate. Environmental Justice communities are particularly hard hit, bearing disproportionate placement and expansion of polluting industrial operations. Therefore, we believe a Green Amendment to New Jersey’s State Constitution is necessary to safeguard the environmental rights of all people, and to protect the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part. As part of the democratic process, we call on our elected legislators to cast a vote for the joint resolution which is needed to put the question before the voters on this November’s ballot."

“The inspiring wording of the proposed NJ Green Amendment puts environmental rights for current and future generations right where they belong - in the Constitution,” adds **Lindsey Kayman, President of the Environmental Education Fund**.

At today's press conference, residents from all over the state took the opportunity to "testify" as to why having a NJ Green Amendment is important to them.

"The New Jersey Green Amendment is critical to all of us but specifically those of us in the younger generations as it protects our right to pure water, clean air, stable climate, and a healthy environment," said **Hope Lagemann, a resident of New Jersey**. "The Green Amendment protects all people, and guarantees our basic rights."

When asked why the Green Amendment matters to him, **James Mastrich Jr., a New Jersey resident**, replied, "Because I love my children".

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