

“Generating Equity: Deploying a Just and Clean Energy Future.”

Written Testimony of Chandra Farley, Just Energy Director, Partnership for Southern Equity before the Subcommittee on Energy of the Committee on Energy and Commerce

April 20, 2021

Good morning, to Honorable Chairman Bobby L. Rush and all Members of the of the Subcommittee on Energy, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Chandra Farley, and I am the Just Energy Director at the Partnership for Southern Equity, a nonprofit advocacy organization based in Atlanta, Georgia. I am honored to provide this testimony with recommendations for “Generating Equity: Deploying a Just and Clean Energy Future”.

Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) exists to advance policies and institutional actions that promote racial equity and shared prosperity for all in the growth of metropolitan Atlanta and the American South - a region riven by racial, economic and class inequities. These societal barriers have hampered the opportunity for marginalized communities to lend their perspective to the shaping of their clean energy future and to fully benefit from rapidly expanding clean energy markets.

Equal rights under the law, or equality, have afforded many opportunities to those previously denied “certain unalienable rights.” However, an equity agenda accounts for differences in opportunities and burdens, as well as needs, to propose and pursue just and equitable solutions to achieve systems level change. Utilizing equity as lens, PSE coordinates advocacy across four key issue areas: energy (Just Energy), land use/development (Just Growth), health (Just Health) and economy (Just Opportunity). Our main strategies are community organizing, leadership development, coalition building, authentic community engagement and leveraging data and research. Just Energy is our framework for advancing energy equity which we define as the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens, of energy production and consumption. We advance Just Energy by deploying our main strategies to build civic power with Black communities, communities of color, rural and low-wealth communities across the south.

While unfamiliar to many residents, equity-centered energy, utility, and climate policies can positively impact household economic stability and improve the overall quality of our air, land, and water - natural resources that affect our health and well-being. However, Black communities, communities of color, rural and low-wealth communities across the south remain virtually unrepresented in the energy planning and decision-making processes that drive inequitable outcomes in energy production, distribution, and regulation.

The data is clear, marginalized, and under-resourced communities in the South bear a disproportionate burden of the negative impacts of our changing climate and carbon-based energy production. Three of the top five biggest carbon polluters¹ in the power sector are in the South where investments in equitable clean energy continue to lag due to the lack of consumer-directed investment by utilities. According to the American Council on Energy Efficient Economy’s 2020 Energy Efficiency Scorecard², five deep south states, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and New Orleans rank at the bottom of lists for

¹ 2017 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions from Large Facilities. Retrieved from <https://ghgdata.epa.gov/ghgp/main.do>

² Berg, W., S. Vaidyanathan, B. Jennings, E. Cooper, C. Perry, M. DiMascio, and J. Singletary. 2020. *The 2020 State Energy Efficiency Scorecard*. Washington, DC: ACEEE. [aceee.org/research-report/u2011](https://www.aceee.org/research-report/u2011).

energy efficiency policies and programs to reduce energy use, such as adopting or advancing energy-saving targets. This is compounded by the fact that four southern cities - Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, and New Orleans, continue to post some of the highest rankings for energy burdens³ - the portion of household income paid toward energy bills. This is directly related to the bottom tier rankings for energy efficiency policies and programs and the many barriers to underfunded weatherization assistance that can reduce these high burdens.

Also, the South experiences a higher frequency of billion-dollar weather and climate disaster events⁴ than any other region. And, the Southeast regions serve as home to 84 percent of all U.S. counties that experience persistent poverty⁵ (defined as a county in which at least 20 percent of the population experiences poverty for three decades or more). Pile on the fact that we now have hundreds of thousands struggling families and essential workers that are losing access to electricity, water and broadband due to the economic fallout from COVID, and lack of supports for utility shutoff moratoriums, voluntary or mandated, in the midst of a global pandemic. Georgia Power, for example, reported more than 131,000 shutoffs - equivalent to 6% of its customers.⁶ You can see why Just Energy is an urgent and pressing matter.

By highlighting the inequities present across the energy sector and connecting the dots between energy, racial injustice, economic disinvestment, health disparities and other associated equity challenges, PSE can organize with community and across stakeholder sectors to channel their civic power for energy equity advocacy. Strengthened by the deep relationships resulting from the community organizing, coalition building, leveraging data and research and leadership development offerings, PSE has built a “Southern Equity Ecosystem” positioned to shape a just and equitable transformation of the energy sector. A sector that no longer depends on the extreme extraction of human, natural and economic resources from distressed communities, but one that supports a regenerative, clean energy economy rooted in shared principles of social, environmental, economic, and racial justice. And to be clear, these are the principles that are required to generate equity and deploy a just and clean energy future.

An equitable society is one in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. The goals of equity must be to create the conditions that allow all to reach their full potential. So then, national energy policy must also create the conditions, and remove barriers, that allow state and local governments to ensure all residents can benefit from the increased economic development, improved health outcomes and environmental justice that can flow from a just transition to a distributed, democratic, and clean energy ecosystem.

We can generate equity through increased deployment of clean energy, energy efficiency and weatherization by –

- Reducing energy burdens by lowering utility bills and stabilizing energy costs

³ Drehobl, A., Ross, L., and Ayala, R. 2020. *How High are Household Energy Burdens?* Washington, DC: American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

⁴ Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Mapping. Retrieved from <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/mapping>.

⁵ 2009. *Exposed Social vulnerability and climate change in the US Southeast*. Available at: <<https://s3.amazonaws.com/oxfam-us/www/static/media/files/Exposed-Social-Vulnerability-and-Climate-Change-in-the-US-Southeast.pdf>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

⁶ Ryan, G., 2021. *Power Crisis: Despite Transparency Failures, Utility Information Reveals Major Home Shutoff Problem*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/energy-justice/pdfs/Power-Crisis-Report-March-2021.pdf>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

- Improving financial stability by providing entrepreneurship and thriving wage job opportunities
- Reducing harmful carbon emissions that pollute our air
- Promoting economic development and building community wealth

Reduce energy burdens by lowering utility bills and stabilizing energy costs

Energy insecurity is a major systemic problem. Nearly one-third of U.S. households (31%) have reported facing a challenge in paying energy bills or sustaining adequate heating and cooling in their home and about one in five households reported reducing or forgoing basic necessities like food and medicine to pay an energy bill. Fourteen percent reported receiving a disconnection notice for energy service and some 11 percent of households surveyed reported keeping their home at an unhealthy or unsafe temperature due to inability to pay their bill⁷.

We know that clean energy investments like weatherization, energy efficiency, rooftop solar and community microgrids work. Investments like weatherization can reduce the low-income energy burden by at least 25 percent⁸. Energy efficiency and solar energy creates healthier home environments and can stabilize energy costs for working families, senior citizens, and low-wealth communities. Weatherization, energy efficiency, rooftop solar and community microgrids are also job creation and small business development strategies. Energy Efficiency employed over two million people in 2019 and Energy Efficiency employers added 54,000 net jobs in 2019⁹. American solar jobs have increased 167% over the past decade and in the five-year period between 2014 and 2019, solar employment increased 44%, five times faster than job growth in the overall U.S. economy¹⁰. Of course, the importance of energy and racial equity in these critical sectors can be seen in the fact that only eight percent of solar workers in 2019 were African-American¹¹ and that the deployment of solar technology itself, a report published in the *Nature Sustainability* journal found that census areas with over 50 percent African-American or Hispanic populations have close to 40 percent less solar panel installations than white-majority census tracts, even when controlling for household income.¹² And now, the impacts of COVID that are disproportionately affecting Black, Hispanic, and Native American communities are resulting in a 38% decline that is taking the solar industry back to 2014 levels¹³.

COVID is not only impacting clean energy delivery industries but is also putting energy insecure Americans at risk. Mounting utility bills exert a crippling financial burden for many, especially workers earning low wages and seniors living on fixed incomes. Approximately 4.8 million households were unable to pay at least one energy bill during the past year and a similar number received a notice from their utility that they faced the threat of disconnection from energy service. Of those that received a

⁷ Eia.gov. 2015. *RECS: One in three U.S. households faced challenges in paying energy bills in 2015*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.eia.gov/consumption/residential/reports/2015/energybills/>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

⁸ Drehobl, A., Ross, L., and Ayala, R. 2020. *How High are Household Energy Burdens?* Washington, DC: American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

⁹ 2020. *2020 U.S. Energy & Employment Report A Joint Project of NASEO & EFI*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.usenergyjobs.org/s/USEER-2020-0615.pdf>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

¹⁰ 2020. The Solar Foundation, *National Solar Jobs Census 2019*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.SolarJobsCensus.org>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

¹¹ 2020. *The Solar Foundation, National Solar Jobs Census 2019*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.SolarJobsCensus.org>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

¹² Sunter, D., Castellanos, S., & Kammen, D. (2019). Disparities in rooftop photovoltaics deployment in the United States by race and ethnicity. *Nature Sustainability*, 2(1). doi: 10.1038/s41893-018-0204-z

¹³ SEIA. 2021. *COVID-19 Impacts on the U.S. Solar Industry | SEIA*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.seia.org/research-resources/covid-19-impacts-us-solar-industry>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

notice, more than two in five families had their energy shut off.¹⁴ These numbers equate to tens of millions of Americans. We now have an entire new population of people depending on emergency assistance like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA) representing the state directors of LIHEAP called on House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr. in an October 2020 letter. Referencing the *Generating Equity: Improving Clean Energy Access and Affordability* hearing, Mark Wolfe, NEADA Executive Director, noted the vast gap between the mounting utility bill arrearages and assistance that would not be able to keep up with the need¹⁵. Particularly considering the expiring shutoff moratoria that allowed COVID-impacted residential and small business customers to defer utility payments without the threat of losing service. While the patchwork of voluntary and seasonal shutoff protections have been invaluable to millions, Mark Wolfe stated that residential and small business customers could owe \$35 billion to \$40 billion dollars to their utilities by March 2021. Mark goes on to state that NEADA's new arrearage data shows that by then, individual unpaid bills may be as high as \$1,500 to \$2,000, which is as much as some customers pay for electricity in a year.

The resulting utility burdens on Black, Hispanic, Native American communities and low-wealth people of color are being amplified by this crisis. While we push for the clean energy investments like weatherization, energy efficiency and rooftop solar that we know can reduce the energy burden and provide long-term benefits, we must remain steadfast in our push for a utility shutoff moratorium that can provide short-term relief for the chronic issue of utility shutoffs.

These examples further demonstrate the impact of societal barriers on the ability of marginalized Americans to access clean energy benefits such as lower bills, better jobs, and cleaner air.

Improve financial stability by providing entrepreneurship and thriving wage job opportunities

Generating equity through clean energy deployment must include a strategy for lifting people out of poverty and advancing an economic inclusion agenda that increases equity in the distribution of income, wealth building, employment, and entrepreneurship among marginalized populations. Tens of millions of jobs have been lost due to COVID, and the historic inequities plaguing Black communities and communities of color are being exacerbated by the ongoing economic fallout. A Pew Research Center survey finds that about half of U.S. adults who are currently unemployed, furloughed or temporarily laid off and are looking for a job are pessimistic about their prospects for future employment, and most say they have seriously considered changing fields or occupations since they have been unemployed¹⁶. President Biden's American Jobs Plan, and the promise of higher-paying, unionized clean energy jobs with family-sustaining benefits can meet this movement moment through equity – creating a path from despair, to hope to change.

¹⁴ Memmott, T., Carley, S., Graff, M. *et al.* Sociodemographic disparities in energy insecurity among low-income households before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nat Energy* **6**, 186–193 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-020-00763-9>

¹⁵ Wolfe, M., 2020. [online] Congress.gov. Available at:

<<https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/111070/documents/HHRG-116-IF03-20201001-SD003.pdf>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

¹⁶ PARKER, K., IGIELNIK, R., & KOCHHAR, R. (2021). Unemployed Americans are feeling the emotional strain of job loss; most have considered changing occupations. Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/02/10/unemployed-americans-are-feeling-the-emotional-strain-of-job-loss-most-have-considered-changing-occupations/>

With President Biden's American Jobs Plan specifically naming energy efficiency, we have a great opportunity to seize this historic investment for improved financial stability for struggling families and the creation of thriving wage job opportunities, entrepreneurship, and small business development. When the housing market crashed and the Financial Crisis of 2008 ensued, my housing sector career disappeared almost overnight. Thanks to the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA), I found a new career direction in a southeast based nonprofit whose groundings in building science boomed with training and technical assistance in energy efficiency and weatherization. The Southeast Energy Efficiency & Weatherization Training Center was created and approximately 2,000 workers were trained in Georgia. This was a tremendous success that proves training programs work. But today, we ask ourselves - Where are those workers now? What happened to them when the money dried up? Why don't we know? Especially now when one of the top issues for the energy efficiency and solar industry is finding qualified and skilled workers? We have much to learn from ARRA successes and failures as we embark on an economy recovery and infrastructure investment centered in addressing the climate crisis.

Paula Glover, president of the Alliance to Save Energy, a nonprofit that promotes energy efficiency is right - as we look to create greater economic opportunity for all communities, energy efficiency also offers an enormous opportunity for job creation. Already, the energy efficiency sector is one of the largest energy workforces in America with more than two million employees - 12 times the size of the coal industry and nearly seven times that of wind and solar combined. And 80 percent of efficiency companies are small businesses with fewer than 20 employees¹⁷.

For every \$1 million invested in building retrofits, almost 12 jobs are created¹⁸. Clean energy jobs paid 25% more than the national median wage in 2019 and were more likely to include health care and retirement benefits¹⁹. These benefits can be realized with investments like those called for in a February 2021 letter to The Honorable Frank Pallone, Chairman and Committee Members of the Committee on Energy and Commerce regarding "Support for Inclusion of Energy Resilient Communities Act (H.R. 448), Low-Income Solar Energy Act (H.R. 4291 (116th Congress)), and New Rural Just Energy Financing Programs in the Next Infrastructure Bill." The Low-Income Solar Act (H.R. 4291) (116th Congress) could provide \$10 billion in funds for community solar infrastructure and project development in low-wealth communities. Like the Energy Resilient Communities Act, Section 4 of H.R. 4291 prioritizes workforce development with the expectation that these jobs must adhere to high-roads labor standards and incentivize unionized labor.

Also, this letter specifically references the opportunities present in our rural communities. The Rural Power Coalition and over 100 organizations that support the seven policies being called for by the #RuralPower campaign represent an opportunity to simultaneously provide urgent relief to the most vulnerable ratepayers in rural areas while also preparing rural electric cooperatives for a 21st century clean energy economy. These investments can improve financial stability by providing entrepreneurship and thriving wage job opportunities measures that will directly benefit the rural electric cooperatives that

¹⁷ Glover, P. (2021). Opinion | Want Environmental Justice? Look to Energy Efficiency. Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://www.politico.com/news/agenda/2021/02/01/you-want-environmental-justice-look-to-energy-efficiency-463839>

¹⁸ Sen, B., Bird, G. and Bottger, C., 2018. *Energy Efficiency with Justice How State Energy Efficiency Policy Can Mitigate Climate Change, Create Jobs, and Address Racial and Economic Inequality*. [online] Available at: <https://ips-dc.org/report-energy-efficiency-with-justice/> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

¹⁹ Ludt, B., 2021. *Clean energy job wages 25% higher than national median, report finds*. [online] Solar Power World. Available at: <https://www.solarpowerworldonline.com/2020/10/clean-energy-job-wages-higher-than-national-median-report-finds/> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

are struggling to finance their transition to clean energy *and* the millions of cooperative member-owners who are currently struggling to pay their bills and believe in the opportunity to make their rural communities thrive again.

Reduce harmful carbon emissions that pollute our air

Last Thursday, the Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change of the Committee on Energy and Commerce held a legislative hearing entitled, "The CLEAN Future Act and Environmental Justice: Protecting Frontline Communities." Dr. Mildred McClain, Executive Director of the Harambee House/Citizens for Environmental Justice was a witness and focused her testimony on H.R. 2021 - the "Environmental Justice for All Act" or the EJ4ALL Act, as the community has termed it. Dr. McClain stated that EJ4ALL is a promising start to long overdue legislation aimed at addressing systemic environmental injustices resulting from federal actions and decisions.

Black people, Hispanic populations, Asian American Pacific Islander communities and Native Americans are all groups that we know are disproportionately impacted by injustices in our environment like unhealthy levels of air pollution. We can also link these unhealthy levels to fossil-fuel based energy production, siting of toxic facilities and proximity to transportation infrastructure. According to researchers at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry 15% of COVID-19 mortality is specifically attributable to fossil fuel-related air pollution, showing that fossil fuel-related air pollution contributes significantly to overall U.S. air emissions²⁰. In another study, researchers from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute also looked at the impact of long-term exposure to fine particle pollution on COVID-19 death rates²¹. Adding to the evidence on the connection between racial disparities, air pollution and COVID-19, the researchers found a 49% increase in the COVID-19 death rate in counties with elevated fine particle pollution and that had a higher Black population²². These findings continue to underscore the critical need to ensure healthy air for all.

There are many guidelines, frameworks and community engagement models that call out, require and account for Public Participation. The Clean Air Act itself recognizes that stakeholders and the public play critical roles in developing standards and implementation of the Clean Air Act. So, they have the Clean Air Act Advisory Committee²³ that includes members from EPA; state, local, tribal governments; academic institutions; unions; environmental and public interest groups; trade associations; utilities; and industries.

The make-up of the Clean Air Act Advisory Committee reminds me of my work at Partnership for Southern Equity and our Equity Circles. All our key issue areas - energy, health, opportunity, growth host a circle. These spaces, like our Just Energy Circle²⁴, are used to mobilize advocacy around energy equity issues. The Circle includes individuals, businesses and organizations representing frontline communities, subject-matter experts, houses of worship, youth groups and academia all working together and

²⁰ Michael Petroni *et al* 2020 *Environ. Res. Lett.* **15** 0940a9

²¹ Wu, X., Nethery, R. C., Sabath, M. B., Braun, D. and Dominici, F., 2020. Air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States: Strengths and limitations of an ecological regression analysis. *Science advances*, 6(45), p.eabd4049.

²² Wu, X., Nethery, R. C., Sabath, M. B., Braun, D. and Dominici, F., 2020. Air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States: Strengths and limitations of an ecological regression analysis. *Science advances*, 6(45), p.eabd4049.

²³ Clean Air Act Advisory Committee (CAAAC) | US EPA. (2021). Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://www.epa.gov/caaac>

²⁴ Just Energy Circle. Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://sites.google.com/view/pse-just-energy-circle/home>

organizing to forge collective action towards a more equitable, inclusive, clean energy future for all. The equity circles are built to create safe space for the often difficult conversations we must have to address the root causes of environmental injustice. And, to connect the various business sectors, community groups and residents that must work together to create more just and equitable solutions. One of the things I most value about our Just Energy Circle is that this is where those of us who are used to the privilege of having the mic first, being called on first, or being asked to speak first learn to step back. We learn to make space for the people who have the lived experience to shape the just and equitable solutions that we are all striving to realize.

We must learn from the work of the Just Energy Circle, the leadership of Dr. Mildred McClain, leaders of the environmental justice movement like those recently appointed to the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council²⁵ and frontline organizations like Harambee House and the fenceline communities they organize with. This is where the fruitful lessons of what is really required to reduce harmful carbon emissions that pollute our air are practiced - reaching out to the communities that are first and most impacted by legacy pollution and equipping them with the capacity and tools to meaningfully engage in, and lead, the full spectrum of decision making, and accountability setting, that impacts their economic stability, community health and well-being.

Related, H.R. 2021, the EJ4ALL Act very specifically references NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act²⁶ which clearly lays out engagement protocols when there is a proposed federal action that may affect an environmental justice community. NEPA requires the federal government to consider all potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts caused by the action. NEPA requires the federal government to provide early and meaningful community involvement opportunities, providing notice of any step or action in the process. This “fair treatment” and “meaningful involvement” is environmental justice. It is through the environmental justice principals that we can reverse the current realities and redress the legacy of environmental racism to achieve equity and realize a just and equitable clean energy future.

Promote economic development and build community wealth

When considered together, promoting economic development, and building community wealth can put us on a path to a just clean energy future that centers racial equity and shared prosperity. Community wealth building (CWB) is a system-changing approach to community economic development that works to produce broadly shared economic prosperity, racial equity, and ecological sustainability through the reconfiguration of institutions and local economies on the basis of greater democratic ownership, participation, and control.²⁷ These aspirations for a more just and equitable economic system have strong signals in the Biden-Harris American Jobs Plan (AJP) that centers environmental justice as necessary to address the climate crisis.

AJP goals such as clean energy block grants that can be used to expand clean energy, increase worker empowerment, and advance environmental justice are the right priorities for this moment. However, these goals must be financed at a level of investment that can build the operations infrastructure to sustain the capacity needed to deliver the benefits. One such strategy is Justice 40 established by President Joe

²⁵ White House Announces Environmental Justice Advisory Council Members | The White House. (2021). Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/29/white-house-announces-environmental-justice-advisory-council-members/>

²⁶ National Environmental Policy Act. (2020). Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://www.epa.gov/nepa>

²⁷ Defining Community Wealth Building. (2020). Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <https://community-wealth.org/content/defining-community-wealth-building>

Biden's January 27 executive order 14008 on climate change²⁸. The order, and the infrastructure within the executive branch to implement it, creates a government-wide Justice40 Initiative with the goal of delivering 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities and tracks performance toward that goal through the establishment of an Environmental Justice Scorecard.

The Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Economic Impact and Diversity will lead this effort through a new role committed to implementing Justice40. This is a massive undertaking with far-reaching implications and potential equitable outcomes such as federal funding for community-led projects that get built, a stronger ecosystem of businesses owned by leaders from Black and historically disinvested communities of color, enabling these businesses to compete for opportunities more effectively, and offers greater actionable awareness among decision makers of structural biases inherent in resourcing systems towards reparation and restoration.

As Justice40 is housed within DOE, H.R.1375 - the Energy Equity Act of 2021²⁹ introduced by Congressman Bobby Rush is the kind of capacity investment we need in the DOE delivery infrastructure. The Energy Equity Act of 2021 would establish an Office of Energy Equity within DOE. Under this act, the Director of the Office of Energy Equity is directed to operate in accordance with Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. And that the purposes of this Act, shall provide, direct, foster, coordinate, and implement energy planning, education, management, conservation, and delivery programs of the Department that –

- promote an agency-wide environmental justice strategy and interagency collaboration;
- reduce or stabilize energy costs within underserved or disadvantaged communities; and
- increase the availability of energy conservation measures within underserved or disadvantaged communities.

The Energy Equity Act of 2021 will be critical to inform equitable research, development, and deployment within the DOE and outside the agency in the frontline communities that must be included in the full spectrum of decision-making. It is these communities that must be positioned to benefit the most from the shared accountability embedded in this act and Executive Order 12898.

The levels of funding possible across energy, water, housing, and transportation represent a transformative opportunity for reparation and restoration of historically disinvested communities that are being left out of the clean energy transition. This includes rural communities served by rural electric cooperatives that power 56 percent of the nation's landmass and serve 42 million Americans. Proposals such as reforming the Rural Utility Service Hardship Loan Program could direct \$100 billion to facilitate the retirement of all coal plants currently in operation and potentially all outstanding electric cooperative

²⁸ The White House. 2021. *FACT SHEET: President Biden Takes Executive Actions to Tackle the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, Create Jobs, and Restore Scientific Integrity Across Federal Government* | The White House. [online] Available at: <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/27/fact-sheet-president-biden-takes-executive-actions-to-tackle-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad-create-jobs-and-restore-scientific-integrity-across-federal-government/>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

²⁹ H.R.1375 - Energy Equity Act of 2021.

debt in exchange for new investment in clean energy, distributed energy resources, energy efficiency, high-speed broadband, storage, and electric transportation with new loans at U.S. Treasury rates³⁰.

Closing

The Climate Leadership and Environmental Action for our Nation’s (CLEAN) Future Act introduced by Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee Chairman Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Energy Subcommittee Chairman Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) can deliver on many of the policies that generate equity through increased deployment of clean energy, energy efficiency and weatherization by –

- Reducing energy burdens by lowering utility bills and stabilizing energy costs
- Improving financial stability by providing entrepreneurship and thriving wage job opportunities
- Reducing harmful carbon emissions that pollute our air
- Promoting economic development and building community wealth

Each section of the CLEAN Future Act can “Generate Equity” as we deploy a just and clean energy future with the “whole of government” and “environmental justice for ALL” approach. From the power sector to the building sector, to the transportation sector and industrial sector. The explicit naming of reducing air pollution that disproportionately harms frontline communities; requiring that workers be paid prevailing wages and retain the right to organize; ensuring that states have ample guidance and funded support, the CLEAN Future Act presents a strategy backed up by the infrastructure and capacity investment needed to advance a “CLEAN Future” strategy. Yet, equity is about more than strategy.

As we work to ensure our strategies are aligned with a vision, we must always return to and lead with the comprehensive environmental justice provisions that can advance “environmental justice for ALL”. We must understand how important it is that the capital communities need can be found through mechanisms such as the Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator. Combined with a frontline community informed Justice40 initiative, the \$100 billion dollar commitment for the Clean Energy and Sustainability Accelerator can transform the underlying systems of racial oppression while building lasting, institutionalizing change. We must be clear that as we leverage the purchasing power of the federal government to drive this energy efficiency and clean energy deployment, we not only reduce electricity bills, but we also address the legacy pollution that is still ravaging our Black communities, Tribal communities, and communities of color because of environmental racism. And, we must commit to the establishment of an interagency framework as called for in the Worker and Community Transition section of the CLEAN Future Act to make sure we are taking care of the fossil fuel workers and coal country communities that have kept this country growing for the last 150 years.

When we ask ourselves how deploying a just and clean energy future can generate equity, we must recall the definition of equity itself - Just and fair inclusion. An equitable society is one in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. More specifically, as this testimony clearly points out, we also need a racially equitable society, one where society’s benefits, nor burdens, would be skewed by race. I see this opportunity in the just transition that is at once a principle, a process, and a practice. The Just Transition Alliance defines just transition as “a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and waste-free. The transition itself must be just and equitable, redressing past harms (reparations) and

³⁰ #RURALPOWER. 2021. #RURALPOWER. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ruralpower.us/>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just Transition describes both where we are going and how we get there.”³¹ In short, an equitable and just transition creates the path from hope to change.

The time is now to act. The time is now to direct investment. The time is now to flip the systemic inequities in our social, economic, and environmental systems to a forward thinking, regenerative future.

Thank you.

³¹ What is Just Transition? | Just Transition Alliance. Retrieved 19 April 2021, from <http://jtalliance.org/what-is-just-transition/>