

February 18, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Chairman
Committee Members
Committee on Energy and Commerce, U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: 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

Dear Chairman Pallone and Congress Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide, we, the undersigned 26 organizations—including energy justice, environmental justice, racial justice, solar workforce, consumer advocate, and faith organizations—urge the House Energy and Commerce Committee (“Committee”) to include crucial energy justice spending provisions in the next stimulus package.

Households across the country are struggling to afford and access reliable and clean energy – a vital human right threatened by the climate emergency and a centralized, fossil fuel-laden, and inequitable power system. These households are disproportionately low-wealth and from Black, Brown, Indigenous and other communities of color. COVID-19 has exacerbated this energy violence, with hundreds of thousands of families at risk of utility shutoffs due to the economic downturn. Indeed, recent research has shown how lack of access to electricity during COVID-19 has fatal consequences. A recent study from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that had a nationwide moratorium on utility disconnections been imposed from March through November 2020, COVID deaths could have been reduced by 14.8 percent and infection rates reduced by 8.7 percent.¹

We urge Congress to take immediate action to address the racial injustices embedded in our power system and promote a clean energy transition. In doing so, Congress can also generate millions of union and family-sustaining jobs desperately needed to revive the economy in this COVID downturn. We urge the Energy and Commerce Committee to pass a stimulus bill that builds a clean, distributed, and democratic energy system for an equitable and climate-resilient future to resolve the problems of our current system.

First, we recommend that the next infrastructure bill include the Energy Resilient Communities Act (H.R. 448) to build critical clean energy microgrids for long-term climate resilience. Recently re-introduced by Congresswomen Barragan (CA-44) and Clarke (NY-09), the Act’s Section 2(k)(1) authorizes \$1.5 billion annually in grant funding for clean energy microgrids, with a priority on low-wealth communities and communities of color. We recommend, however, that the appropriations allotted to this program be significantly increased to at least \$10 billion in order to build out substantial microgrid infrastructure.

¹ Kay Jowers, Christopher Timmins, Nrupen Bhavsar, Qihui Hu, Julia Marshall, *Housing Precarity & The COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts of Utility Disconnection and Eviction Moratoria on Infections and Deaths Across US Counties*, NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH (January 2021), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28394>.

Second, we support the inclusion of the Low-Income Solar Act (H.R. 4291) (116th Congress) in the next spending bill to provide funds for community solar project development in low-wealth communities. However, we recommend that appropriations for this vital program be substantially increased to \$10 billion in order to establish significant community solar infrastructure. Like the Energy Resilient Communities Act, we support Section 4 of H.R. 4291 which prioritizes workforce development with the expectation that these jobs must adhere to high-roads labor standards and incentivize unionized labor.

Third, we urge Congress to create a new Rural Just Energy Financing program to spur a just transition to energy justice solutions for the Tennessee Valley Authority as well as municipal and electric cooperative utilities serving rural communities. We recommend that \$10 billion in funds be allocated to replace existing and planned fossil fuel infrastructure with distributed clean energy in public power agency jurisdictions and electric cooperatives serving rural communities. As part of this financing scheme, the government can buy out the utilities' stranded fossil fuel assets in exchange for these utilities, like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), committing to 100% clean and renewable energy generation by 2030 with the implementation of community solar programs and battery storage technology at distribution and end-user levels. Additionally, TVA and federal Power Management Agencies should act as "living labs" to research and expand emerging energy democracy models, including innovative solar microgrid technologies.

As our nation continues to suffer from COVID pandemic and we increasingly experience harms of the climate crisis, infrastructure spending must support solutions to both promote economic recovery and advance the clean, distributed and just energy system that the climate emergency demands.

Please contact Gaby Sarri-Tobar, (202) 594-7271, gsarritobar@biologicaldiversity.org should there be any further information we can provide.

Sincerely,

Jean Su
Energy Justice Director
CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Johanna Bozuwa
Co-Manager, Climate and Energy Program
DEMOCRACY COLLABORATIVE

Nathaniel Smith
CEO & Founder
PARTNERSHIP FOR SOUTHERN EQUITY

Basav Sen
Climate Policy Director
**INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES: CLIMATE
POLICY PROGRAM**

Glen Brand
Vice President, Policy and Advocacy
SOLAR UNITED NEIGHBORS

Cheryl Barnds
Co-Chair
RAPID SHIFT NETWORK

Marie Venner
Co-Chair
CATHOLIC NETWORK US

Marie Venner
Co-Chair
CALL TO ACTION COLORADO

Marie Venner
Co-Chair
**COLORADO DEMOCRATIC PARTY: ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVE**

Marie Venner
Co-Chair
**COLORADO BUSINESSES FOR A LIVABLE
CLIMATE**

Karen Bearden
Coordinator
350 TRIANGLE

Timothy DenHerder-Thomas
General Manager
COOPERATIVE ENERGY FUTURES

Sherry Pollack
Co-Founder
350 HAWAII

John Farrell
Co-Director
INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE

Miya Yoshitani
Executive Director
ASIAN PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

Robin Schneider
Executive Director
TEXAS CAMPAIGN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Pierrette Cazeau
President and Founder
**HAITI CHOLERA RESEARCH FUNDING
FOUNDATION INC**

David Krantz
President
AYTZIM: ECOLOGICAL JUDAISM

Mary Gutierrez
Director
EARTH ETHICS

Al Weinrub
Coordinator
LOCAL CLEAN ENERGY ALLIANCE

Alexandra Wyatt
Policy Director and Legal Counsel
GRID ALTERNATIVES

Susan Jaffe
Executive Board Member
**SOUTH BEACH DISTRICT 6 DEMOCRATIC CLUB
OF SAN FRANCISCO**

Adam Browning
Executive Director
VOTE SOLAR

Alice Madden
Energy Democracy Staff
COMMUNITY POWER

Mary Kay Benson
Steering Council Manager
350 BUTTE COUNTY

Marianne Comfort
Justice Coordinator
**SISTERS OF MERCY OF THE AMERICAS JUSTICE
TEAM**