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March 4, 2020

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor
State of New York
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We, the undersigned Assemblymembers, write to you today to strongly urge that all parties to the state budget -- but with the understanding that gubernatorial leadership is crucial -- work within this year's budget process for accelerated action on climate change, even as we await the work of the Climate Action Council. We are pleased that that newly-constituted group convened for its first meeting on March 3rd and is beginning its work on developing a scoping document for our state Climate Action Plan, which includes responding to public comment on that draft plan, all of which will likely take almost three years. We are grateful for your leadership in enacting this new law, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), requiring this effort to commence.

We're also confident that you understand the growing threat from Climate Change and that there is no reason to wait nearly three years to launch an aggressive plan to weatherize, insulate and make energy efficient all the homes, businesses and institutions in New York State. It is well-understood by experts around the nation (and our own NYSERDA), that efficiency measures in buildings can reduce energy use by somewhere between 30%-40%, as documented by the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy. This means that we could immediately put New York State on a path to quickly achieve significant reductions in our release of greenhouse gases. Reducing energy demand on this scale would allow us to avoid building any more fracked gas plants or large pipelines. Therefore we urge, in the strongest possible terms, that you carve out, in the 2020-21 budget, **at least \$2 billion, from the Clean Energy Fund (CEF), or any other appropriate funding source, to launch a statewide, all-buildings, energy efficiency initiative**, as we await our state climate action plan by the end of 2022. This will allow us to immediately begin to reduce New York's contribution to climate change and bring the ambitious goals of the CLCPA within reach.

You are, no doubt, aware of the latest UN report of November 2019, the Emissions Gap Report, which says, according to The New York Times (11/26/19), "that greenhouse gas emissions are still rising dangerously," and that "deeper and faster cuts are now required" if we are to avoid catastrophic warming of the planet. Every day, we see in the news the receding of the polar glaciers, the calving off of ice from the polar ice shelf, and the very worrisome melting of the Arctic permafrost, releasing

massive amounts of methane, which we now know is about 86 times more powerful than CO2 as a greenhouse gas over twenty years. We all can see, more immediately, the serious and repetitive flooding in the Southern and Midwest US and devastating fires in California and Australia, as average global temperatures continue to rise. New York annually incurs approximately \$10.2 billion per year in costs due to carbon emissions (based on a \$50-per-ton social cost of carbon and our most recent state greenhouse gas inventory).

Given the overwhelming evidence that the effects of global warming are happening now, it is clearly time for us to end New York's reliance on fossil fuels. We are very grateful again that, under your leadership, our state has prohibited hydro-fracking, and our Department of Environmental Conservation has denied water quality permits for over \$5 billion in new major pipelines in New York State. However, we all have to acknowledge that New York has also recently built two new fracked gas-powered power plants, and that we are on a course to increase our use of fossil fuels in New York, with nearly 50% of our energy coming from fossil fuel, making it impossible to meet the goals of the recently-enacted CLCPA.

The best way to quickly and significantly reverse these trends, we believe, is to help New Yorkers conserve energy in order to reduce demand for energy, cutting emissions by 30-40%, by using CEF funding to help finance an energy retrofit workforce of tens of thousands of workers to ramp up efficiency work on all types of buildings, in proportion to the urgent gravity of this moment. If we had a Climate Action Plan in place now, surely this would be the first step we would take to achieve the most benefit with the least amount of spending. Efficiency as a first step makes eminent sense. As you said, Governor, in your 2016 *Built to Lead Agenda*: “The least expensive and most-effective way to meet our state energy goals is simply to reduce the overall energy consumption of New York’s homes, businesses, and institutions by making them more efficient. Increasing energy efficiency also lowers utility bills for customers and enables businesses to reduce their operating costs.”

You were right about that in 2016, and we were very glad to see you roll out your proposal recently to make such an effort on conservation (and, by extension, emissions reductions) by spending \$1.5 billion over seven years (about \$214 million per year) on an efficiency initiative in government buildings. However, we strongly urge, given the dire and immediate threat we face, that you expand the scope of that plan and add considerably to the funding, by including all types of buildings in the state and by carving out \$2 billion from the already-extant CEF, or any other viable source of funding, to subsidize something akin to Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps, or a new Marshall Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We understand it’s very important to transition to renewable energy as soon as possible. With only about 4% of our total energy in NYS coming from wind and solar, we’ll need to work to ease that critical transition. It’s important, also, to keep in mind that the ability to meet our state’s ambitious renewable energy targets will depend on meeting our efficiency goals. We don’t have to wait to make very significant progress on reducing emissions. Especially in light of the abdication of responsibility by the Trump Administration in pulling the U.S. out of the Paris Accord, the states must act now. We all know that New York has always taken the lead on issues of enormous moral consequence, from abolition to women’s rights to environmental protection, and we must do it again at this perilous moment.

We are facing many serious and compelling issues in this current budget, and we care deeply about many of them – PreK-12 and Higher Education, Medicaid funding for critical health care services, Transportation, Housing, Child Care, etc. They are all very important – and we need to respond appropriately in these areas -- but none are as important as our response to global climate change. We need to respond aggressively and without delay in this year’s budget to the ever-more ominous calls from our scientists, and what Alden Meyer of the Union of Concerned Scientists, calls our “sleepwalking toward a climate catastrophe,” saying that we need to “wake up and take urgent action” (Ibid, NYT).

We urge, in the strongest possible terms, that we do just that, Governor, and therefore ask that you lead the effort to carve out at least \$2 billion in 2020 to launch a statewide, all-buildings, energy efficiency program that would be the logical starting point to greatly reduce New York's contribution to global climate change.

Thank you, Governor, for your recent leadership over the past several years in the area of Climate Change. We urge your consideration of this important request to build on that work.

Sincerely,

Barbara Lifton Lifton
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Kevin A. Cahill Cahill

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Harry B. Bronson
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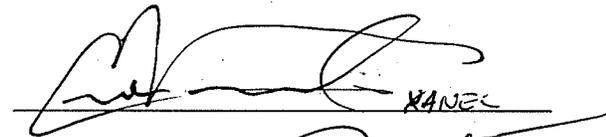
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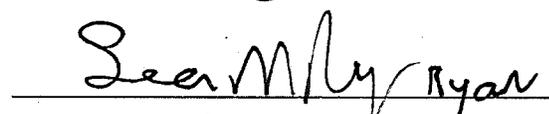
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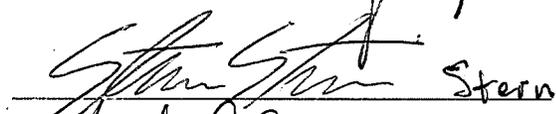
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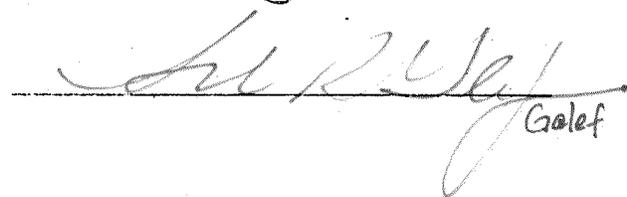
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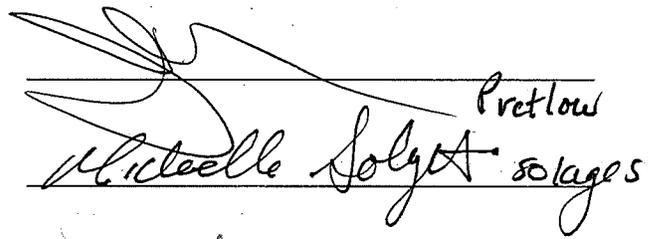
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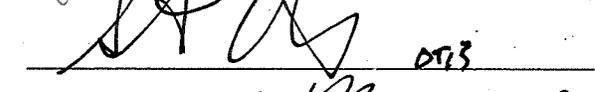
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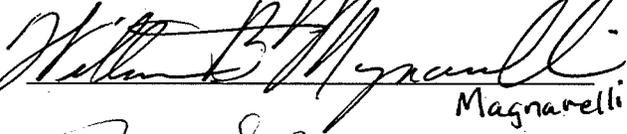
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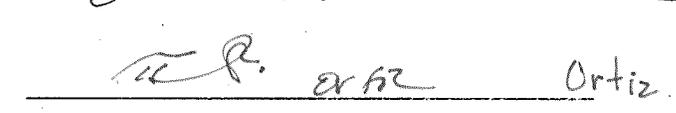
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cc:

Hon. Carl Heastie, Speaker of the Assembly

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Temporary President and Majority Leader of the Senate

Hon. Helene Weinstein, Chair, Assembly Committee on Ways & Means

Hon. Mike Cusick Chair, Assembly Committee on Energy

Hon. Steve Englebright, Chair, Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation

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