NEW JERSEY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE SUMMIT
Protecting Environmental Justice Communities from the Detrimental Impacts of Cumulative Pollution and Climate Change: Summary of Outcomes

The New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance (NJEJA) and the Center for American Progress (CAP) co-hosted the first-ever statewide New Jersey Environmental Justice and Climate Summit on April 4th at the Mercer County Community College in Trenton. The summit goal was to bring together state officials, members of Congress, and members of the environmental justice community to discuss solutions to tackle pollution and climate change impacts in New Jersey’s low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and Indigenous communities, often called environmental justice (EJ) communities. For too long, disproportionately high levels of pollution from power plants, incinerators, landfills, and other sources have accumulated in cities like Newark, Trenton, Camden, and other EJ communities. In addition, EJ communities are more vulnerable to the detrimental impact of climate change, including more frequent and extreme weather events already observed in the United States. The summit was held on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., to create an opportunity to reflect on King’s legacy and advance progress toward EJ.

More than 100 EJ advocates, policy makers, concerned citizens, and experts from New Jersey and the surrounding region participated in the summit. Summit speakers included New Jersey Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy’s Chief Policy Advisor Kathleen Frangione, and Deputy Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Debbie Mans. Other speakers included Dr. Nicky Sheats, Ana Baptista, Laureen Boles, Valerie Caffee, Nicole Scott-Harris, and Kevin Moore of NJEJA; Rev. Louise Scott-Rountree, Manager of Clergy Affairs to Newark Mayor Ras Baraka; Cecilia Martinez of the Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy; Chief Vincent Mann of the Turtle Clan of the Ramapough Lenape Nation; Michele Roberts of the EJ Health Alliance; Lisa Garcia of Earthjustice; and Alison Cassady and Cathleen Kelly of CAP.

As Gov. Phil Murphy prepares to set new environmental priorities for New Jersey, he has an opportunity to work with EJ leaders to develop strategies to reduce carbon pollution and associated co-pollutants, prepare for...
climate change effects, expand access to clean energy, and address cumulative pollution impacts in EJ communities. At the summit, EJ leaders and other participants made a compelling call for Governor Murphy to make EJ a top priority and recommended the following strategies and policies for state and local leaders and community and environmental advocates:

1. **Use climate change mitigation policy to address disproportionate pollution in EJ communities.** The EJ community expressed opposition to New Jersey re-joining the Regional Greenhouse Initiative (RGGI). If the state re-enters the program over EJ community objections, EJ leaders urged Governor Murphy to lead on incorporating EJ solutions into climate change mitigation policy by designing New Jersey’s RGGI rules to require reductions of both greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution and co-pollutants from plants located in and near EJ communities. RGGI, as a market-based program and as currently designed, does not guarantee emissions reductions in EJ communities, even if it lowers overall GHG emissions.

2. **Shape energy efficiency policies to address existing barriers to accessing efficient technologies in EJ communities.** Homes, schools, and community centers in EJ communities often face structural problems that limit the ability of EJ communities to take advantage of energy efficiency and renewable energy. State and local leaders in New Jersey, and leaders at the federal level should design policies to support both energy efficiency-technology readiness and efficiency improvements in EJ communities.

3. **Improve the design of energy efficiency and renewable energy programs to benefit EJ communities.**

   - State, local, and federal policymakers, academic institutions, and foundations should support research on how energy efficiency and renewable energy programs can be better designed to benefit EJ communities.

4. **Support community energy planning.** State and local policy makers should support community energy planning to create workable solutions that tackle the energy needs of low-income residents, and residents of color in EJ communities. Community energy planning is more flexible and just compared to top down standardized energy planning and can assess costs and savings, educate people on energy efficiency benefits, and support job training to employ community members to install clean energy technologies.

5. **Create a New Jersey energy master plan.** New Jersey state leaders should create a model state energy master plan that would commit the governor to implementing specific and tangible actions to reduce pollution and improve public health, and quality of life in EJ communities.

6. **Promote economic inclusion.** New Jersey state leaders must design policies, programs, and incentives to promote economic inclusion and build pathways to good careers in the clean energy field.

7. **Engage EJ communities.** New Jersey state and local leaders must meaningfully engage EJ communities to shape effective plans and policies that support self-determination and benefit EJ communities.

8. **Adopt and use a tool to assess and reduce cumulative pollution impacts in EJ communities.** New Jersey state leaders should adopt a tool to assess the cumulative impacts of pending permits that will affect EJ communities in form permitting decisions. Without such a tool, residents are at risk of being bombarded by harmful toxic pollution from multiple sources that, when evaluated separately, may each emit levels of pollution deemed within safe levels. Other state leaders should adopt a similar tool. This tool should be part of a policy to substantially reduce pollution in EJ communities (see Recommendation 9 below).

9. **Pass EJ legislation.** The New Jersey state legislature should pass an EJ bill that would require NJDEP to identify EJ communities with the highest level of cumulative impacts burden and protect them from new and existing sources of pollution, including by rejecting pollution permit applications under specified circumstances. The bill should also offer “quality of life” incentives that would, among other things, increase the availability of affordable nutritious food, increase greenspace and attract non-polluting businesses to EJ communities.
10. **Enforce existing environmental laws.** NJDEP must enforce existing environmental and public health protections to hold polluters accountable and to improve living conditions in EJ communities.

11. **Create an emergency preparedness checklist and community-level adaptation and emergency plans.** Government officials, community residents and groups, and EJ advocates should collaborate to create a community checklist to help prepare households and communities for disasters and emergencies. The checklist should include steps to raise residents’ awareness of what they should do before and during an emergency or disaster, and gather information to support people who need help evacuating. City and state officials, community residents and advocates, and EJ groups should also partner to create community level adaptation and emergency plans. City and state agencies should provide resources to support the participation of community and EJ representatives in the creation of these plans.

12. **Build EJ partnerships led by EJ groups.** National groups working on EJ state policies should do so only in partnership with local EJ organizations that lead such partnerships. Environmental groups should also work in partnership with the EJ movement in urban areas, where the majority of people live, to build the next generation of EJ and environmental advocates to drive effective policies, and hold politicians accountable for unhealthy urban environments. The EJ movement should lead these partnerships.

**Summit Discussion Highlights**

The highlights from each of the summit discussion sessions are described below. Short interviews with EJ leaders and summit panelists can be found on the [NJEJA Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/NJEJA).

**Remarks by Rev. Louise Scott-Rountree, Good Neighbor Baptist Church**

Rev. Louise Scott-Rountree acknowledged the great turnout at the summit to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. She discussed how people remember King for his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech and his 1968 "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech. Yet, King lived under the constant threat of death and incarceration. Many people didn’t know that King was often discouraged, but he did not give up.

Even though we come from different backgrounds and neighborhoods, Rev. Rountree talked about how we are all connected. Dr. King wrote in his letter from a Birmingham jail that, “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” For this reason, Rev. Rountree said that we should all be concerned about the environment, including how pollution is impacting struggling communities.

King didn’t just fight for people of color. He spoke on behalf of all people to defend social and human rights. He stood for fair treatment of all people. Similarly, the environmental justice movement seeks to achieve fair treatment and engagement of all people to ensure equal protection from pollution. Rev. Rountree concluded by saying that “social justice cannot be achieved without environmental justice, including universal access to clean air, water, and soil.” She said, “We all must do our part to make environmental justice a reality.”
Remarks by Kathleen Frangione, Chief Policy Advisor to Governor Murphy

Kathleen Frangione thanked summit participants for their work to advance environmental protection. She told EJ leaders in the room, “You have a friend and advocate in your new governor, Phil Murphy.” Frangione emphasized that the governor is committed to environmental justice. She said, “This administration recognizes and appreciates the complexity of this issue. We are considering a full range of options for addressing it.” She noted that the governor will prioritize ensuring access to solar in urban areas by supporting community solar projects, in addition to grid scale solar energy strategies, and other solutions that create jobs.

Frangione highlighted several actions by Governor Murphy during his first few weeks in office to reduce the state’s dependence on fossil fuels and to transition to 100 percent clean energy by 2050, including an executive order that sets a goal of generating 3,500 megawatts of electricity by 2030, from offshore wind farms. She also discussed the governor’s executive order to bring New Jersey back into RGGI—a multistate effort to curb carbon pollution from power plants using an emissions trading program. Frangione mentioned that Governor Murphy directed that primary consideration be given to EJ communities in deciding where and how to spend the proceeds from selling emissions allowances through RGGI. She acknowledged that NJEJA and other environmental justice leaders have concerns about the state rejoining RGGI, but emphasized that the governor is committed to working with the EJ advocates to shape the rules to respond to the needs of EJ communities. Frangione said that she would like to hear from NJEJA if this doesn’t happen.

Frangione provided additional details on the governor’s executive orders, including the establishment of an interagency task force on offshore wind and the multi-department collaborative effort on implementing RGGI, both of which have ambitious timelines to move forward over the next 18 months. She also highlighted that the governor supports a ban on fracking in the Delaware River Basin, and is working to protect the state’s coastline by opposing the Trump Administration’s plan to open the Atlantic to offshore drilling.

Frangione noted that progress on environmental protection has left behind low-income communities and communities of color. She said that “the outcomes of disproportionate pollution in environmental justice communities, combined with other inequities is untenable,” and for these reasons NJEJA’s work is critical. Frangione said that the state’s work on environmental justice needs to be multidisciplinary and take a holistic approach. This approach will require hospitals to work with communities to ensure that kids with asthma receive treatment, public housing officials to make progress on removing lead paint from homes, and the Department of Transportation to improve access to public transportation and economic opportunities. Frangione echoed Rev. Rountree’s remarks about all life being inter-related, and concluded by saying “we must work to ensure a just, equitable New Jersey that enhances the quality of life for everyone.”
Panel One: Ensuring Environmental Justice Communities’ Access to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, with Dr. Cecilia Martinez, Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy; Kevin Moore, NJEJA; Lisa Garcia, Esq., Earth Justice; and Alison Cassady, CAP (moderator)

There is an estimated $60 billion dollars in energy efficiency investments in the United States every year. Yet, we continue to hear that low-income communities and communities of color have difficulty accessing these resources. Cecilia Martinez discussed how historically, there has been a massive investment in energy efficiency programs since the oil crisis of the 1970’s. These investments largely occurred in areas with high levels of electricity use. Meanwhile, energy use in low-income communities was often low because they could not afford expensive appliances, so energy efficiency programs were often not targeted to these areas. Currently, only eight percent of energy efficiency programs serve low-income communities, and there is virtually no data on whether energy efficiency programs are serving communities of color.

Kevin Moore discussed NJEJA’s work in the West Ward of Newark, New Jersey to expand access to energy efficiency and renewable energy, and to strengthen community resiliency, by improving disaster preparedness, green infrastructure, and raising awareness of climate change mitigation strategies. Moore discussed economic and social barriers to addressing climate change, including the reality that many people are struggling with day-to-day survival and can’t focus on what will happen in ten years.

Lisa Garcia discussed why federal environmental laws, energy efficiency standards, and renewable energy access are important to EJ communities. She described how the Trump Administration is rolling back critical environmental protections that were put in place during the Obama Administration, such as the Clean Power Plan (CPP), lead dust hazard standards, and a ban on a harmful pesticide, and how these rollbacks disproportionately effect EJ communities. Garcia discussed how the Obama Administration made it a point to integrate EJ into EPA’s work. For example, energy efficiency standards targeted old buildings and appliances that are responsible for 30 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, many of which can be found in low-income communities and communities of color.

Dr. Martinez described how policy makers have allowed for the lowest cost energy options, including coal and gas, to be located in EJ communities, which inevitably leads to a higher pollution burden in EJ communities. She discussed how some climate change policies have been designed as market-based programs to reduce overall carbon pollution, without focusing on where the majority of emissions occur. Dr. Martinez emphasized that market-based approaches cannot ensure that emissions from power plants in EJ communities will be reduced. For example, the CPP, had it been fully implemented, may have increased pollution in EJ communities, even while lowering overall emissions. This is because the power plants located in EJ communities are often old and inefficient, and expensive to upgrade with new and cleaner technology, yet still
relatively cheap to run. For these reasons, policymakers need to be intentional about designing climate policies to reduce emissions in EJ communities. Dr. Martinez also called for more research to understand how market-based policies effect EJ communities.

Garcia urged advocates to put pressure on local and state governments to prioritize energy efficiency, renewable energy, and EJ. She said that it is also important that we ensure that current federal efficiency and environmental standards are kept in place. Given the Trump Administration’s attack on environmental regulations, Garcia noted that there is more opportunity for environmental progress at the local level. For example, advocates in New Jersey have an opportunity to work with Governor Murphy to make energy efficiency, renewable energy, and EJ high priorities on the administration’s agenda.

Dr. Martinez also discussed why energy efficiency policies need to be intentionally shaped to address barriers to efficient technologies in EJ communities. Policy makers and advocates cannot focus solely on cutting carbon pollution, but instead must look at the bigger picture, including the legacy of disinvestment and the condition of the housing, schools, and infrastructure that limit the ability of EJ communities to take advantage of clean energy technologies. For example, Dr. Martinez said, “it’s great to get a high efficiency furnace in your home, but if you have a hole in your roof it won’t matter. You are not energy efficiency-technology ready.” Many existing energy efficiency programs were not designed with this bigger picture in mind. As a result, program funds have gone primarily to middle income households because they are ready for efficiency-technology installations, increasing the efficiency gap between low and middle-income houses. More research is needed on how energy efficiency programs affect EJ communities, and how they can be better designed to benefit them. City leaders can create incentives for apartment building owners to invest in energy efficiency by providing grants and passing city ordinances.

Moore said that, “we need to have a more candid conversation about climate solutions, because the current conversation has become more complicated than it needs to be.” Moore described how an exploitative and extractive economy negatively effects community health, the environment, and quality of life. He urged advocates to work in urban areas, where the majority of people live, to build the next generation of environmentalists, shape and drive effective policies, and hold politicians accountable. As more solar companies come to New Jersey, policy makers need to create the conditions and incentives for an inclusive economy; for example by launching job training programs that build pathways to clean energy jobs that will help people and communities generate the capital they need to address local environmental issues.

Panelists discussed the need for policy makers to use community engagement to shape effective energy plans and policies that will provide clear benefits and support self-determination in EJ communities. Moore and Dr. Martinez discussed the importance of “meeting people where they are at” to shape and implement clean energy and climate solutions at the community level. EJ communities have a wealth of knowledge and expertise, and governments need to realize this and respect their self-determination.

Dr. Martinez referenced the historic day on which the summit was held, “when one of our most important leaders [Martin Luther King] had to succumb to violence.” She said, “We must acknowledge that the progress we make today has been on the backs of our ancestors who fought for the lives of future generations. The future of our communities rests in our hands.” Dr. Martinez emphasized the need to look hard at what we
need to do without getting overwhelmed, and to start building at the local level through community planning that identifies community energy needs. For example, while solar energy is important in New Jersey, so is ensuring that communities have reliable heating. Dr. Martinez emphasized the importance of community level energy planning to address local needs.

Dr. Martinez noted that governors often follow the lead of other states because they want to embrace what they know works. New Jersey and Governor Murphy have an opportunity to set an example for other states. The panel also urged national groups working on state policies to adopt EJ principles, and to work closely with communities and local groups to shape policies that meet local needs to avoid causing more harm than good. The panel noted that national groups get attached to national policy ideas that may not work locally and have unintended consequences.

Remarks by Deputy Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Debbie Mans, Esq.

Deputy Commissioner Debbie Mans shared that the NJDEP is reviving the EJ office with the goal to improve the quality of life in urban communities overburdened by environmental and public health hazards. She acknowledged the expertise and strength of the advocates in the room, and the reality that it will take time to shape the right EJ policies for New Jersey. Mans said that designing effective EJ policies will also take patience and a lot of listening to EJ leaders in the room. She emphasized that the governor has made EJ a priority, including by directing RGGI auction revenue to be allocated to projects in EJ communities. Mans noted that only 16 percent of New Jersey’s emissions are from power plants, so RGGI will only be one piece of the puzzle. The NJDEP will be looking for opportunities to reduce pollution from other sources as well.

Mans noted NJDEP’s New Jersey Fostering Regional Adaptation through Municipal Economic Scenarios project (New Jersey FRAMES) supports model community resilience planning in the state, and is looking to collaborate with universities to expand engagement with communities. Mans also mentioned that NJDEP’s Coastal office has a “Resilience New Jersey” program that offers grants for regional and community resilience planning. In addition, NOAA has given NJDEP funding to integrate social indexing into resiliency planning.

Mans said that, “it is important to me personally that we do things right and that everyone has access to clean water, air, and safe places to play.” She encouraged summit participants to share their thinking because NJDEP is listening, must be held accountable, and has a lot to learn from the EJ leaders in the room.

During the discussion with audience members, EJ leaders noted that, in some cases, EJ communities have been waiting for decades for government action on the environmental, economic, and social issues plaguing their communities. EJ leaders also pointed out that Republican and Democratic administrations in the past have made unfulfilled promises, and that they hoped that the Murphy Administration would be different. Participants asked Mans to work with NJDEP Commissioner McCabe to accelerate Superfund site cleanup in
New Jersey, and to enforce existing environmental laws. They also urged Mans to work with McCabe and Governor Murphy to re-open weatherization agencies in the state that have been closed, and to create incentives for cities to install electric vehicle charging stations. Mans expressed her desire to facilitate meaningful engagement with EJ communities and EJ leaders to discuss their concerns. She also noted that the Governor is considering how to use Volkswagen settlement money to support electric vehicle use in the state.

**Climate Change Mitigation Policy from an Environmental Justice Perspective, Dr. Nicky Sheats, Esq., NJEJA, Watson Institute for Public Policy**

Dr. Nicky Sheats opened the conversation by highlighting the importance of race. He noted that “cumulative impacts” in the context in which he was speaking could be thought of as a very rough estimate of the total amount of pollution in a community. A more formal definition of cumulative impacts is “the risk and effects from multiple pollutants, from their interaction with each other, and from their interaction with any social vulnerabilities that might exist in a neighborhood.” Dr. Sheats showed figures created by the NJDEP, which indicated that the more people of color living in a neighborhood in NJ, the greater the level of cumulative impacts. Higher numbers of people living in poverty also correlated with elevated levels of cumulative impacts in NJ neighborhoods.

Dr. Sheats highlighted that even though government enforced, and sanctioned segregation was ended more than 50 years ago, “we still have evidence that in New Jersey the amount of pollution in your neighborhood is connected to the color of your skin and the amount of money in your pocket. If we solve climate change but don’t change this pattern of pollution, we have failed.”

Dr. Sheats urged policy makers and advocates to use climate change mitigation policy to address the disproportionate amount of pollution affecting EJ communities. Specifically, he recommended that climate change policies be designed to guarantee GHG pollution reductions in and near EJ communities so there would also be reductions in locally harmful GHG co-pollutants, including fine particulate matter (PM), which is linked to premature death. Taking an EJ approach to climate policy would address climate change while possibly driving down concentrations of fine PM and other GHG co-pollutants to levels not currently achieved.

Currently, the primary climate change mitigation policy that policy makers and national environmental groups have supported is carbon emissions trading. This market-based approach does not mandate emission reductions at all locations. This is a significant EJ concern because EJ neighborhoods shoulder a disproportionate pollution burden. Dr. Sheats noted that, “Market-based approaches leave equity to chance and do not guarantee that emissions are reduced in EJ communities where pollution tends to be elevated. This means that emissions in EJ neighborhoods may go up, stay the same, or go down. The reality is, we need these
emissions to go down.” He said that EJ and equity issues need to be addressed upfront and not left up to the market or dealt with later. “The market doesn’t care about equity,” Dr. Sheats said, so decisions by policy makers to reduce pollution in EJ communities “must be intentional and planned.”

“No one policy will be a silver bullet that will save EJ communities,” Dr. Sheats noted. “Instead, we need cumulative policies to address cumulative impacts.” Dr. Sheats urged state policy leaders to use RGGI to reduce emissions in EJ communities. While state leaders are saying that EJ is a priority, he noted that they haven’t stated how New Jersey’s participation in RGGI will be designed to reduce pollution in EJ neighborhoods. Designating RGGI auction revenue for EJ communities with no specific planning for its use and without ensuring that RGGI will reduce emissions in EJ communities is “sending the wrong signal” on the Governor’s commitment to EJ. This approach sends a message that the Governor’s plan is to focus first on curbing overall carbon pollution, and will “get to EJ later.” Dr. Sheats emphasized that New Jersey, under Governor Murphy’s direction, has an opportunity to be a leader on EJ by incorporating mandatory emissions reductions in EJ communities into New Jersey’s RGGI rule.

PANEL TWO: Pollution in Environmental Justice and Overburdened Communities: How do we address the cumulative impacts in New Jersey and Beyond? Vincent Mann, Chief of the Turtle Clan of the Ramapough Tribe; Michele Roberts, Environmental Justice Health Alliance; Prof. Ana Baptista, The New School and NJEJA; and Nicole Scott-Harris, NJEJA (moderator)

Nicole Scott-Harris opened the panel by noting that looking at the cumulative impacts of pollution is relatively new. She mentioned a landmark cumulative impacts ordinance developed by NJEJA, the Ironbound Community Corporation, Clean Water Action, and allies, which was passed in Newark in 2016 after substantial work by advocates to make it happen. Scott-Harris said, “We had to keep pushing the process forward and not get discouraged.” Even with the ordinance in place, she said, “we need to make sure it is being implemented correctly. The work isn’t over.”

Ana Baptista defined cumulative impacts as “multiple sources of emissions that together hurt people’s health, and the interaction of the pollutants, as well as the interactions of pollution effects with socioeconomic and health vulnerabilities.” She said that cumulative impacts cannot be addressed by a system that approves pollution sources permit by permit. Baptista mentioned that three permits for industrial facilities are up for review in Newark within blocks of each other. If permit reviewers look at each plant individually, they conclude there’s no problem with the pollution levels. But the reality is that communities will feel the effects of the pollution from these three sources together.

Michele Roberts thanked NJDEP for attending the summit and noted that the Delaware DEP often blames New Jersey for Delaware’s pollution. She described the Route 9 industrial corridor and the legacy EJ community in its path. To understand the plight of EJ community members, Roberts said that “we need to look back 150 years and see how racism placed them in a position of bondage and made them separate and unequal--that’s what cumulative impacts means.”

Chief Vincent Mann described how cumulative impacts first began for Ringwood, New Jersey when it became a dumping ground for Ford’s industrial waste. Years later, high-tension power lines were built and the dumps
began off-gassing and making people sick. Communities in the Ringwood area are still suffering. Mann said that, “It’s not the responsibility of the U.S. government to take care of this. It’s the responsibility of NJDEP and the governor. It shouldn’t take a federal policy to affect change here in New Jersey. We can create policies at the state, city and county level.”

Baptista noted, “It’s been eight years since we had a chance to push forward environmental justice and cumulative impacts policy” in New Jersey. She described how “across the country, governors were putting in place procedures, task forces, and advisory councils, but still not changing their permitting process or statutes to tackle the cumulative impacts of pollution.” She said that instead, “environmental racism remains institutionalized.” Baptista called on NJDEP to assess cumulative impacts when issuing new permits, and to put in place a tool that would allow policy makers and communities to assess the disproportionate impacts of pollution, and a policy that will reduce it. Baptista also recommended that the New Jersey state legislature pass an EJ bill that would require the NJDEP to do an Environmental Impact Statement and cumulative impact analysis during the project permitting process and would include a mechanism that actually reduces the amount of cumulative impacts in EJ neighborhoods. Lastly, Baptista recommended that state leaders create a state energy master plan that would commit the governor to implementing specific and tangible actions to reduce pollution and improve public health and quality of life in EJ communities. Roberts recommended that Delaware state leaders adopt similar solutions for Delaware.

Chief Mann concluded the conversation by noting that we have tools at our fingertips, including existing laws and policies, to improve EJ communities, but they need to be enforced. He asked, “How many people live in EJ communities in the state of New Jersey? The state of New Jersey is basically an EJ community. Where does Newark get its water? From a reservoir near a Superfund site. Water is sacred to us. We all are interconnected. What happens in New Jersey affects Delaware. We need to hold each other accountable.”

A Conversation on Bringing New Jersey Solutions to a Federal Level, with Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman and Dr. Nicky Sheats, Esq., NJEJA, Watson Institute, moderated by Cathleen Kelly, CAP

Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman noted that the current Congress has the capacity to act on climate change and EJ, but that it does not have the desire to act. She said that while the Trump Administration rolls back health and environmental standards, Congress isn’t particularly interested. Congress must recognize the will of the people. Young people are marching against guns, but we still need a holistic and robust protest focused on environmental protection.

Watson Coleman said that unfortunately, “people aren’t always paying attention to how pollution and environmental damage affects their lives and health. Maybe people haven’t shown up enough at the ballot box. The way to get Congress to be more responsive to calls for climate change action and environmental justice is to show up at the ballot box and convey the will of the people.” She noted the need to pay attention to the areas where we can work together. For example, “we agree overall that we want an environment that is here for future generations. We might not always agree on a solution, but we agree overall that we need to have an environment that is healthy, air we can breathe, and food we can eat.”
Dr. Sheats discussed the forces that lead to more pollution in EJ communities than in other neighborhoods, including the reality that “the lives of black and brown people have been devalued.” He said, “I think that usually it’s unconscious, but we devalue the needs of communities of color. That’s what the Black Lives Matter movement is about. We have to call it out. If we don’t talk about it, we aren’t going to find a solution.”

Congresswoman Watson Coleman discussed how she opposes the Trump Administration’s move to cancel the CPP—which would have curbed carbon pollution from power plants—and the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement. She also said that she supports the EJ community’s stance that climate change policies should address equity and justice issues, for example, by reducing the high levels of air pollution in EJ neighborhoods along with greenhouse gas emissions. She said that “communities should not be pitted against each other to compete for meager resources. There has to be a carve out to remediate the effects of historic impacts.”

Pollution and the impacts of climate-fueled extreme weather events – like Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and more recently Harvey, Maria, and Irma – often have an outsized impact on the health, safety, and economic standing of women. The Congresswoman discussed the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls that was formed to look at the intersection of health and economic issues with gender issues. She emphasized that implementing environmental and climate justice solutions is critical to protecting the health and human rights of women and girls. The reality is, women can be the breadwinner and the head of household. Rep. Watson Coleman said that, “With children often exposed to pollution before they even take their first breath” and women often in the primary caregiver role, women are disproportionately impacted by climate change, pollution, and asthma.

In response to a question from the audience about the 50th anniversary of the Kerner Commission report on the causes of the 1967 race riots in the United States, the Congresswoman said that, “the report reminds us of where we have been and where we need to go.” She said, “We need to remind ourselves that we can march, because we may have thought that the battles were won and there was no longer a need for that.”

Dr. Sheats urged policy makers to shape climate change policies to reduce both air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in EJ communities. He discussed the standard that the federal government sets for particulate matter (PM). “In New Jersey, we are meeting the standard, but PM 2.5 is still making people sick. We’ve got to get it as low as we can get it. We need all policies on deck to lower the concentration of these pollutants in our communities,” Sheats said. Audience members highlighted the need to reach people who do not have college degrees, because exclusion is not always solely based on race, but often socio-economic status as well. We need to be creative to bring working people to the table, who often can’t get time off to participate in community engagement efforts.

When asked what kind of communication really moves people and the Congress, she emphasized that social media, phone calls, emails, and showing up all matter. “We have 30 members of congress who are retiring this year, not because they are old, but because they see there is a challenge to their leadership. Now is the time to
show the will of the people,” said Watson Coleman. She reminded the audience that Martin Luther King said, “If you can’t fly, run. If you can’t run, walk. If you can’t walk, crawl. And if you can’t crawl, just move!”

**SANDY CLIMATE JUSTICE ROUNDTABLE**

The Sandy Climate Justice Roundtable was created in October 2013 by NJEJA, the NJ Climate Change Adaptation Alliance, and other partners to discuss what occurred in EJ communities during Superstorm Sandy, and to identify EJ community resilience solutions. NJEJA was and has been the primary organizer of the Roundtable. The Roundtable produced numerous recommendations, which are contained in a report commissioned by the NJ Climate Change Adaptation Alliance, and written by the Center for the Urban Environment of the Watson Institute for Public Policy at Thomas Edison State University. Roundtable members are currently attempting to implement three prioritized recommendations. A committee has been created to pursue each recommendation, and each of those committees met during the Summit so they could inform the public about their activities and gather new ideas. Committee discussions are summarized below.

**Breakout One: Community-led Solutions to Increase Access to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, led by Dr. Nicky Sheats, NJEJA, Watson Institute**

The energy efficiency committee of the Sandy Climate Justice Roundtable incudes multiple organizations, and over time has created a plan to try to ensure that energy efficiency and renewable energy are accessible to EJ communities. Part of this plan has entailed reaching out to the Urban Mayors Association to see which mayors would like to work with the committee on energy efficiency. There is also a national workgroup led by Dr. Sheats and Dr. Martinez that grew out of their, and others, work on the CPP which organized webinars, trainings for EJ groups, meetings with Big Green groups, and a national forum in Houston in October 2016. The current national workgroup includes the Natural Resources Defense Council, Earthjustice, Union of Concerned Scientists, Sierra Club, Little Village EJ Organization, WEACT, CEED, the Environmental Justice Health Alliance, GAIA, NJEJA, and the New School. The workgroup wants to offer its EJ, environmental, legal, and technical expertise to help implement the mandatory emissions reduction recommendation presented by Dr. Sheats during this event in two pilot states—New Jersey and Illinois. More important for the Roundtable energy efficiency committee is that the workgroup wants to help ensure that EJ communities have access to energy efficiency and renewable energy. One of the next steps taken by the Roundtable energy efficiency committee will be to shape a specific ask of policy makers.

Discussion participants had varying interests and levels of knowledge regarding energy efficiency and renewable energy policies in New Jersey, and in solutions and challenges in EJ communities across the country. While some participants asked for clarification as to what renewable energy resources the Roundtable was considering (i.e., wind, solar, and geothermal), other participants posed questions leading to a more complex discourse. Discussion recommendations included:

- Preventing clean energy and energy efficiency funding from being used by policy makers for other purposes. For example, Governor Murphy recently used $140 million from the clean energy fund for
transportation. While investments in transportation are important, it was not the intended purpose of the fund.

- Holding the state legislature accountable, including by assessing all energy and environment bills and budgets to guard against the influence of special interest lobbyists.
- Ensuring that heating solutions are part of the policy conversation instead of focusing solely on electricity and solar, especially since so many people need better heating options.
- Supporting community solar. Community solar is not currently allowed in New Jersey, though PSEG does have targeted large scale solar on brownfields adjacent to residential areas. Participants expressed the desire to ensure that those installations are benefiting communities, as well as the concern about the safety of installations on brownfields. A PSEG representative said that the installations are safe and that all communities connected to the grid benefit from solar installations, though local land use regulations often do not allow solar to be installed directly into a community.
- Supporting community energy planning. Participants discussed how many of the above issues could be addressed through community energy planning, which can structure investments and workable policies that target low-income people and EJ communities. Community energy planning can tackle individuals’ needs and be more flexible than top down standardized energy planning. A just community energy plan would assess costs and savings; educate people on energy efficiency benefits; employ people in the community to install clean energy technologies; support job training; and staff people who can provide advice to community members on energy policies, revolving loans, and tax incentives for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

**Breakout Two: Designing Dynamic Climate Justice Curricula, led by Valorie Caffee, NJEJA**

The curriculum committee of the Sandy Climate Justice Roundtable is implementing the Roundtable’s recommendation that a climate justice curriculum be developed and used in New Jersey schools.

NJEJA has a long history of working with students on environmental issues through mentoring, engaging them in air sampling projects, and other forms of fieldwork. The curriculum committee has been working with teachers in Long Branch High School to design a climate justice curriculum for students. Long Branch is a community that was heavily impacted by Superstorm Sandy and knows firsthand the impacts of climate change. The committee repurposed workshop models from NJEJA trainings in Newark to design a curriculum with input from teachers at Long Brach High School. The committee is also launching a contest focused on the impacts of Superstorm Sandy and organizes student volunteers to interview people to collect narratives about Superstorm Sandy.

One of the barriers to designing a curriculum is that it must apply to all students. Some parents question why their kids need to learn about climate justice. Teachers are often overburdened with work, so the curriculum can engage students without adding to a teachers’ workload. The curriculum combines climate science with social science to expand the view of EJ to include the natural, built, and social environment.

**Breakout Three: Community-led Resiliency Planning, led by Laurreen Boles, NJEJA**

Many communities were hit hard by Superstorm Sandy. People could not get to work, and some were without power for eight weeks. Communities with access to support from local groups, like the Ironbound community,
were able to recover better than communities without assistance. Many people were not ready for Superstorm Sandy and they didn’t know how to prepare. The Roundtable’s community resilience committee aims to implement the Roundtable recommendation that community level adaptation and emergency plans be created through a collaboration of government, community residents, community groups, and EJ groups. The state government should provide funds to support non-governmental participation in plan development.

NJEJA is working with other members of the Roundtable’s community resilience committee to purchase and distribute emergency preparedness kits for community members, to identify evacuation routes, and to encourage community members to develop evacuation plans. Roundtable community resilience committee members have also visited community centers to ensure that they have working air conditioning and are prepared to host people during an emergency, surveyed community members on their level of preparedness, and bought generators for senior centers and libraries. The community resilience committee intends to develop housing rental agreements for people with mobility challenges that will ensure support during disasters, especially during evacuations and when elevators are down. The community resilience committee is also developing call lists that churches and other groups can use to call people during disasters to see if they need help. Breakout group participants discussed the following additional solutions:

• Creating a community checklist to help prepare households and communities for disasters and emergencies. The checklist should include raising awareness among residents about what they should do before and during an emergency or disaster (e.g., when to shelter in place v. when to evacuate) and gathering information to support people with health risks and who need help evacuating.
• Helping local groups who know the area, and the community members, to develop plans that will support their communities during disasters. Designate a municipal institution, e.g., the fire department, to participate in and support the plans.
• Bringing emergency managers together with community groups to identify barriers to evacuation, sheltering in place, etc. and identify solutions.
• Contacting the offices of emergency management in New Jersey municipalities to ask if they are helping to prepare EJ communities, have back-up generators at shelters and key facilities in case of power outages, and have back up shelters in case existing shelters are damaged.
• Encouraging city leaders to apply for funding through the Resilient New Jersey program, which offers support to build regional resilience and planning among three or more municipalities. Often municipalities need to coordinate during emergencies. For example, evacuation plans need to consider where people will go once they are evacuated and whether there are shelters in other areas with capacity to receive evacuees.
• Municipalities and industries need to develop evacuation plans for areas with high levels of toxic pollution, and alert people ahead of emergencies so they can prepare and evacuate. During Sandy, many industries didn’t have emergency plans, leaving communities to cope with the impacts of polluted storm water and associated health impacts.
• State and city leaders need to set firm evacuation deadlines for residents to ensure that people leave before an extreme weather event hits. Once disaster strikes, it is too late to evacuate, so people should be advised to shelter in place.
• State and city leaders need to alert drivers via electronic signs about emergencies and disasters and identify which radio station drivers should tune in to for safety information. Often the focus is on big
weather events, but the small events can be dangerous too. For example, commuters can get diverted, and then stuck in traffic with dangerous conditions. Younger people rely on Twitter and their phones for alerts, but if they don’t have service, they need to know what radio station to turn to for information.

• State and local leaders, the media and advocates need to lift up stories that convey why disaster and emergency preparedness is important and share information about risks so people can prepare.

• State and local leaders should support emergency preparedness and planning, and support local groups who know community members and can help them develop preparedness and evacuation plans. These plans should be tailored to the needs and risks in each community. City leaders should designate a municipal institution, for example, the fire department, to support planning. Municipal emergency managers should also gather with community groups to identify barriers to evacuation, sheltering in place, and other challenges, as well as solutions.

• Cities and community groups should partner with research and academic institution to fill information gaps, for example identifying where the majority of people with mobility issues live so they can receive evacuation support.

• Community organizations should integrate preparedness conversations into their regular meetings and events to raise awareness and make it a priority in communities. Clergy councils and city councils can also help keep emergency preparedness on peoples’ radar so that it is a community priority.

Summit Conclusions

EJ leaders and summit participants urged Governor Murphy to make EJ a top priority for New Jersey and to embrace the twelve policy recommendations that emerged from the summit discussions and described above. The EJ community and summit participants look forward to working with New Jersey state and local leaders to design effective environmental policies that integrate EJ solutions, including policies to reduce carbon pollution and associated co-pollutants, to prepare for climate change effects, to expand access to clean energy, and to address cumulative pollution impacts.