

Health Voices Call on New York State to Support All-Electric New Buildings for Climate and Health

Re: Health Professionals and Public Health Advocates Support the All-Electric Building Act S6843A|A8431

Dear Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie,

In the name of the signed health organizations, individual doctors and nurses, and public health professionals signed below, and on behalf of the populations we serve and represent, we write to support the All-Electric Building Act. This bill is a common-sense first-step strategy to decarbonize buildings in New York State. It requires New York's state energy conservation construction code to prohibit infrastructure, building systems, or equipment used for the combustion of fuels in new construction for building permits submitted no later than December 31, 2023 if the building is less than seven stories, and July 1, 2027, if the building is seven stories or more. This bill would help us avoid significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, slow climate change and protect human health in New York and beyond.

Time is of the essence: no more missed opportunities

Earlier this year, the IPCC released its latest climate report making it clear that we can still secure a 1.5°C (2.7°F) future, but only if we act now at unprecedented scale and speed. New York State currently emits the most GHG emissions from its residential and commercial buildings than any other state in the country – what the state does or does not do in the next decade matters. New York's own Climate Action Council scoping plan says that to meet our Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA)-mandated climate targets, we need legislation to be passed this year to enable an efficient, all-electric code for new construction that starts for small buildings in 2024. If the All-Electric Building Act is not passed this year, we will fall behind on our climate goals. This is our chance to prevent the emission of an additional 4 million metric tons of CO₂ by 2040 beyond the reductions already expected from a similar law recently passed in New York City – the equivalent of keeping 870,000 cars off the road for one year.

Addressing a public health crisis with all-electric buildings

The burning of fuels in our buildings releases many health-harming pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}). This pollutes the air both outside and inside our homes, causing a public health crisis.

Outdoor air pollution

PM_{2.5}–Outdoor PM_{2.5} from burning fuels in our buildings has led to an estimated 1,300 early deaths, which translates to roughly \$14.4 billion in health impact costs in 2017, the most recent data available indicates. This pollution disproportionately harms people of color. New Yorkers of color are exposed to 2.6 times as much PM_{2.5} pollution from residential gas appliances than whites.

NO_x–New York's buildings also currently emit 43,000 tons of NO_x pollution, more than



buildings in any other state. Exposure to NO_x is commonly linked to respiratory diseases, particularly childhood asthma. Outdoors, NO_x leads to the formation of PM_{2.5} and ozone, also referred to as smog and soot. Exposure to these two health-harming pollutants is associated with decreased lung function, respiratory illnesses, emergency department visits, and even premature mortality.

The state has suffered poor air quality for decades, consistently violating health-protective air quality standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), signaling that year after year, New York's efforts to improve air quality have fallen short of what is necessary. The burden of this negligence falls on poor communities and communities of color. Lower-income households are more likely to be exposed to poor outdoor air quality. Asthma is the most common chronic condition in children, with children of color experiencing the highest asthma prevalence.

Decarbonizing all of New York's buildings will result in substantial health benefits that will improve the quality of life for millions of New Yorkers throughout their entire life.

Indoor air pollution

A growing body of scientific evidence indicates that the air we breathe indoors can be two to five times – and occasionally more than 100 times – more polluted than outdoor air. Gas stoves are a main contributor to poor indoor air quality. Gas stoves emit several pollutants – PM_{2.5}, NO_x as well as deadly carbon monoxide (CO), and formaldehyde – some of the same pollutants that come out of a car tailpipe. Gas burners have been shown to leak methane even when they are turned off. Methane leaks greatly increase the climate impact of gas stoves. Outdoors, methane is the primary contributor to ground-level ozone.

Pollution levels from everyday use of gas stoves often exceed the limits set by outdoor air quality standards, and are often much higher than guidelines set by the World Health Organization. Recent research strongly recommends the complete elimination of gas stoves as even opening windows or running mechanical ventilation is not adequate in reducing gas stove pollution.

Children living in a home with a gas stove have a 42% increased risk of having asthma symptoms and a 24% increased risk of being diagnosed with asthma by a doctor, according to the most recent peer-reviewed meta-analysis. New Yorkers carry an asthma burden much higher than the national average, nearly 10% of our population has a current asthma diagnosis. Asthma leads to 287 deaths annually in New York. Eliminating gas stoves from some of our most personal environments will help protect all New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable.

All-electric new construction is a common-sense solution

If New York wants to escape the deep hole of the climate and health consequences of burning fossil fuels or gas alternatives in our buildings, the first step is to stop digging. We cannot continue to build and invest in buildings that are burning fuels. In addition, public subsidies for gas hook ups hide the true cost of burning fuels in our homes. It's time to stop.

All-electric new construction is not novel; multiple jurisdictions across the nation, including



New York City, San Francisco and 53 other cities/counties in California and Washington State, have adopted policies supporting the elimination of burning fuels in new buildings, recognizing all-electric new buildings as cost-effective, safe, healthy, and feasible.

We call on you to join us, and the New Yorkers we represent, to support the All-Electric Building Act. Our health and environment depend on it.

Sincerely,

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