

New Jersey League of Conservation Voters

COMMON AGENDA FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

2024 - 2025



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WHAT IS NEW JERSEY LCV'S COMMON AGENDA?

Each Legislative Session, New Jersey LCV, as the convener and political voice for the environment in New Jersey, brings together a diverse group of advocates and surveys its members to inform our Common Agenda for the Environment.

This legislative agenda reflects shared policy priorities of what the environmental community and partners want to see prioritized during a specific legislative session.

This Common Agenda was assembled with the input and guidance of partner organizations, the New Jersey LCV and New Jersey LCV Education Fund Board, the New Jersey LCV Policy Committee, and our members.



NEW JERSEY LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS 2024 COMMON AGENDA

For the 221st legislative session, the five priorities featured in New Jersey LCV's Common Agenda for the Environment include:



1 – CLEAN ENERGY

Requiring 100% clean electricity from renewable energy sources by 2035, with strong commitments to reduce pollution in overburdened communities. This goal will put New Jersey at the forefront in the fight against climate change by meeting President Biden's goal for a clean energy transition.



2 – OPEN SPACE AND PARKS

Preserving open space and natural resources by promoting responsible development that reduces the impacts large warehouses have on the environment and expanding access to our already protected spaces for all residents.



3 – TRANSPORTATION

The transportation sector contributes most to climate change and localized air pollution in New Jersey. We need to expand access to clean, reliable public transit to reduce emissions and pollution.



4 – DRINKING WATER

Establish legislation to protect public health from emerging contaminants, and invest in clean drinking water infrastructure. Clean drinking water is an essential human right and emerging contaminants threaten both human health and water quality.



5 – VOTING RIGHTS

Voter eligible New Jersey residents face barriers that limit access to voting. We need to remove these barriers so that voters have access to their constitutional right.



SECURING A 100% CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

- **Legislative Priority:** Develop and adopt Clean Electricity Standard (CES) legislation requiring 100% clean electricity by 2035 and net negative emissions by 2050, with strong commitments to reduce pollution in overburdened communities through complementary policies like addressing pollution from peaker plants and strong commitments to air quality monitoring and creation of family-sustaining jobs.
- **Budget Priority:** End diversions 100% from the Clean Energy Fund.

A commitment to 100% clean energy by 2035 would be one of the most ambitious state climate goals in the nation. New Jersey policy makers recognize the critical need to mitigate the climate crisis by decarbonizing the economy through catalyzing clean energy production. New policy tools and regional approaches to dramatically expand the development of renewable resources within the regional electric grid, extending from Illinois to Virginia, have been explored and require finalization. New Jersey's Energy Master Plan of 2019 called for a 100% clean electricity standard to augment or replace the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS). After more than two years of policy exploration and development, technical conferences with national experts, and stakeholder input, it is time to adopt a Clean Electricity Standard.

The current RPS and Renewable Energy Credit market were important policy tools to begin the buildout of solar and wind resources, but lack key features needed to reduce emissions at higher levels of renewable deployment. Implementing a CES would accelerate more aggressive clean energy requirements in order to generate additional greenhouse gas emission reductions in the state and in the wider regional grid.



SECURING A 100% CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

Based on the most recent International Panel on Climate Change findings, the new CES should require 100% of all electricity sold to be from clean electricity by 2035. At the same time, the CES should be structured to provide strong ratepayer protections against excessive costs, and paired with significant complementary policies to reduce pollution in overburdened communities, such a plan to close out peaker plants - the dirtiest and most expensive power plants that only run when demand is highest, codifying New Jersey's laudable offshore wind goals, improvements in county air monitoring programs, and programs to help electrify the most inefficient households. We must also ensure that the transition to the clean energy future provides good, family-sustaining local jobs, especially for those transitioning away from the fossil fuel industry and those who have been overburdened with the effects of pollution.



PRESERVING OPEN SPACES AND PARKS

- **Legislative Priority:** Rein in rapidly expanding and unsystematic warehouse sprawl to prioritize responsible development and protect intact open spaces and surrounding communities.
- **Budget Priority:** Ensure robust funding for open space preservation at this critical time for the garden state, America's most densely populated state. Continuing the Corporate Business Tax (CBT) surcharge to create a dedicated funding source for preserving open spaces or find other ways to ensure the increased funds can be available for important programs like the blue acres program which buy flood prone properties

Parks and open space improve physical and psychological health, strengthen communities, serve as resources and habitat for wildlife, provide environmental and economic benefits to area residents and make neighborhoods and cities more attractive places to live and work. New Jersey is the most densely populated state, which is why it is so important to protect and invest in new and existing green spaces. Over the past few years, significant work has been done to dedicate funding for open space preservation; however, real estate is increasingly expensive and funding still is limited for maintenance. Additionally, many residents, predominantly Black and Brown communities lack adequate access to well-designed, funded, and maintained parks, playgrounds or green spaces within a 10-minute walk from their home or place of work. Green and open spaces are crucial to the wellbeing of a community and can be used for collaborative projects like community gardens, which can revitalize communities and provide access to fresh produce. There is a recognized



PRESERVING OPEN SPACES AND PARKS

in the state for additional park maintenance funding and staff at the DEP to maintain and operate state parks and open spaces to make sure that everyone has equitable access to them, no matter their zip code, language, or physical ability.

Moreover, one major threat to New Jersey's open and green spaces is the rapid and unsystematic expansion of warehouses. Warehouse sprawl has become a real threat to the quality of life in communities throughout the state. Due to the e-commerce boom, further facilitated by the COVID pandemic; New Jersey's strategic location between two massive domestic and international markets; and comprehensive highway networks, has made the state a hub for warehouse sprawl. The rapid surge of large-sized warehouses has catalyzed significant issues that cross municipal boundaries, including diesel-fueled, heavy-duty trucking traffic; air pollution; stormwater; and loss of open spaces. In addition, thousands of New Jersey's undeveloped greenfield acres can be lost without a coordinated regional approach to warehouse development. In many cases, open spaces have been haphazardly developed without consideration of the impacts on neighboring municipalities. As a result, surrounding towns are left grappling with increased traffic and tractor-trailers on their local roadways. The state needs to find a solution to this ongoing issue without placing the burden on environmental justice communities.



REDUCING TRANSPORTATION POLLUTION

- Adoption of a low carbon transportation standard centered on environmental justice and creating funding to support electrification of the transportation sector and support for electrification in overburdened communities. This policy reduces transportation emissions by incentivizing fuel suppliers to provide lower-carbon-emitting fuel types and supports transportation electrification in overburdened communities that suffer devastating health outcomes from air pollution.
- Support for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and policies to assist renters and those in multi-family homes with electric vehicle adoption.
- Budget Priority: Creation of a dedicated, stable source of funding for NJ Transit to establish a sustainable, reliable and affordable public transit system in the Garden State.

The transportation sector is the single largest emitter of greenhouse gasses (GHG) in New Jersey by sector, accounting for approximately 42% of the state's total GHG emissions, according to New Jersey's Global Warming Response Act 80x50 Report. It is vital for us to reduce overall emissions from our transportation sector to mitigate against climate change and reduce harmful localized air pollutants in our communities, which is why we support reduction of emissions through sustainable, reliable and affordable public transit; transportation electrification; and incentivization of lower-emitting fuel types as we move toward a fully electrified, zero-emission transportation sector.

A fair and strong economy in New Jersey depends on a functioning,



REDUCING TRANSPORTATION POLLUTION

sustainable public transit system that ensures affordable access to jobs, education and healthcare options for all residents. Yet, NJ Transit has been underfunded for decades, and with no dedicated source of funding, NJ Transit has been funded through annual raids to the Clean Energy Fund, but not without budgetary shortfalls. NJ Transit is facing a fiscal cliff of \$1 billion dollars by 2026, which will result in rate hikes, layoffs, cutting stops and routes, and a halt to implementation of innovative plans, including NJ Transit's sustainability plan and additional efforts on electrification. This unfairly places the burden of change on those who can least afford it and could increase car congestion and pollution. New Jersey LCV supports the creation of a dedicated, stable source of funding for NJ Transit to establish a sustainable, reliable and affordable public transit system in the Garden State.



SAFEGUARDING CLEAN DRINKING WATER

- **Legislative Priority:** Addressing emerging contaminants and infrastructure shortfalls and making sure protections apply to both homeowners and renters.
- **Budget Priority:** Investment to keep our drinking water affordable and reliable.

A recent analysis found that New Jersey has the second highest rate of per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water in the country. PFAS have been found virtually everywhere, from the Arctic to the Delaware River, and they have been linked to cancer and other serious human health impacts. PFAS are just one group of emerging contaminants that have alarming human health impacts. Microplastics, which result from the degradation of plastic in bodies of water, are another emerging contaminant that have been found in drinking water in recent years.

New Jersey has served as a leader in addressing emerging contaminants in drinking water. In 2018, New Jersey was the first state to adopt a PFAS maximum contaminant level (MCL). However, the state needs to remain diligent and continue to regulate emerging contaminants and ensure that regulations are sufficiently stringent. Additionally, more studies are needed to fully understand the impacts of these contaminants and to examine strategies for their removal. Clean drinking water is an essential human right and emerging contaminants threaten both human health and water quality. New Jersey LCV will support legislation that addresses the threat of emerging contaminants and safeguards the drinking water of New Jersey residents.

Some of New Jersey's pipes also haven't been upgraded since they were constructed before the American Civil War. Communities all over the state



SAFEGUARDING CLEAN DRINKING WATER

are contending with how to replace lead pipes, remove harmful cancer causing “forever chemicals” from drinking water supplies, while also needing significant investment in tackling stormwater issues that are only getting worse as the occurrence of extreme weather increases. In all, New Jersey’s estimated water infrastructure needs a total of \$30 billion over the next 20 years. Worst of all, without increased and continued large scale investment from the state and prudently deploying federal dollars, these costs will be paid for solely by rate-payers and local property tax-payers throughout the state – and concerningly most economically disadvantaged communities will shoulder disproportionately greater costs.



ENHANCING VOTING RIGHTS

- Legislative Priority: Passage of Same-Day Voter Registration (SDR or SDVR) and New Jersey Voting Rights Act.
- Legislative Priority: Passage of SDR and NJVRA

Not only does the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters have voters in our name, we are committed to ensuring eligible voters have access to their constitutional right unencumbered. In addition, voter participation in New Jersey lags – requiring the removal of barriers that limit access to voting. **The New Jersey Voting Rights Act** - was introduced in 2023, but did not move in the 2022-2023 session. We must pass a strong version of this bill to codify existing federal voting rights protections and expand and strengthen them with fundamental voting protections. Voters in New Jersey, especially voters of color, face too many barriers when it comes to casting their ballots. In recent years, we've seen voting protections in state after state weakened and under attack. New Jersey must pass our own VRA that codifies and expands fundamental voting rights and access. Voters of color often face challenges when trying to vote, such as late openings and long lines on Election Day, struggles with physical access to polling locations for those with disabilities and language accessibility for those with limited English proficiency. Many voters find it difficult to access the court when they are disenfranchised. We are stronger as a nation when all have the right to vote.

Same Day Voter Registration - Same-Day Voter Registration (SDR or SDVR) allows an individual who is an eligible voter to register to vote and cast a ballot on the same day. In New Jersey, voters must register to vote prior to the registration deadline, which is twenty-one (21) days before the election. Over 20 states have removed this arbitrary barrier and enacted a version of Same Day Voter Registration. It is important for increasing



ENHANCING VOTING RIGHTS

access to the ballot for all voters, and it is also a racial justice issue. The registration deadline is an outdated and arbitrary rule that inhibits eligible residents from updating their voting records and registering to vote within three weeks of any election. Numerous social justice organizations have advocated for SDR since its introduction in 2020, and unfortunately this important legislation was not passed in the 2022-2023 session.

Voters who are able to vote for their candidates of choice are able to gain political power to influence and change policies that affect their communities. This can lead to narrowed racial wealth disparities and reduced racial inequality in areas such as health, education, mortality, and other favorable life outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our members, partner organizations, policy committee, board members, and staff who contributed valuable insights and direction for our common agenda this legislative session.

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