United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

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"Solving the Climate Crisis:
Building a Vibrant and Just Clean Energy Economy"

Questions for the Record

Dr. Ana Baptista
Assistant Professor of Professional Practice and
Associate Director of the Tishman Environment and Design Center
The New School
***on behalf of* New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance**
and the Equitable and Just Climate Forum

The Honorable Kathy Castor

1. **Communities across the nation face the compound crises of reduced revenues, increased costs, and aging infrastructure that can exacerbate public health threats. In your testimony, you call for increased investment in climate resilient water infrastructure to address unsafe drinking water and climate-related flooding, sea level rise, and drought. What steps should the federal government take to ensure that federal infrastructure programs identify the needs of vulnerable communities and engage workers, firms, and community organizations in infrastructure planning, siting and design? How can Congress ensure that federal disaster recovery projects in vulnerable communities engage local workers and firms to build back better?**

In order to ensure that federal government actions are responsive to community needs, robust stakeholder engagement processes are essential. Processes to gather input on needs of vulnerable communities should include multiple opportunities and methods through which to gather critical information. Local knowledge should be incorporated into planning, siting and design of federal infrastructure programs and disaster recovery projects.

The unequal impacts of climate change have been long understudied and it is imperative that this is remedied. As the federal government designs research projects related to disaster recovery and infrastructure programs, these projects must also collect equity data and incorporate this analysis into planning, siting and design.

One way that the unequal impacts of climate change can be addressed is to ensure that workers from the most impacted communities have access to the employment opportunities from disaster recovery and infrastructure programs. We also know that in a transition to a cleaner economy more jobs can be generated that provide opportunities for communities. The Clean Energy Future report found that "clean energy" jobs require more workers in sectors such as energy efficiency programs, renewable energy production, and auto manufacturing (making electric cars). Net job gains increase over time, starting at a little under 200,000 per year in 2016-2020, and rising to

800,000 per year in 2046-2050. The report can be found on the ***Reference Page*** of the Clean Energy Future report**.** These projected renewable energy and energy efficiency jobs' increases do not ensure that the economic benefits will go to vulnerable communities. Therefore, it is important for Congress to include policies that directly target benefits for these impacted communities.

In order to engage local workers and build back better in vulnerable communities, Congress can include provisions to employ local workers using guidelines that can be embedded or given preference in programs which receive federal funding such as: community benefits agreements, first source hiring guidelines living wage, paid sick days, preferences for Minority-Owned Business Enterprises and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MBE/WBE) and Ban the Box.

The federal government should also ensure that local community-based organizations, faith based and civic groups are able to access disaster relief funds, job training and placement opportunities that can best connect residents in underserved communities with jobs in rebuilding infrastructure and much needed disaster recovery services. The Illinois Future Energy Jobs Act (FEJA) is a good model for ways to ensure that the local community is integrated throughout the development of the policy, from drafting to implementation.

2. **In your testimony, you call for mobilization of new investment in safe and healthy communities through the creation of a National Climate Bank, with at least 60 percent of the Bank capital to be invested in tribal communities, low-income communities, and communities of color. What additional metrics and criteria should Congress consider as conditions for eligibility or prioritization of investments to ensure just, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure investments?**

To design a National Climate Bank that will deliver real benefits to low income communities, tribal communities and communities of color, the Bank must have criteria to support projects that are community-driven and reflect the needs of the community. In addition, the Bank must have criteria to ensure that project developers work with local officials and community leaders to design and implement strategies to reduce the risk of long-time residents being displaced from their communities as neighborhood improvements drive up rents. These strategies could include an expansion of affordable housing; more inclusionary zoning that breaks down long-standing structural barriers and allows for greater housing density; community land trusts to support locally owned housing and business assets; and job training programs to support access to good careers and jobs.

Specifically, the Bank should include the following project criteria to meet social, environmental, and economic measures:

- Lower energy use and costs for residents
- Reduce local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduce public health risks or damages from more intense heat waves, hurricanes, flooding, other extreme weather events, and sea level rise for residents and businesses
- Address the needs of the community

- Support socio-economic mobility, equitable economic opportunities and affordable access to good jobs, schools, child care, and community services for low-income households, communities of color, tribal communities, women, and/or the disabled
- Create good jobs with fair wages and support the local economy
- Reduce the risks that low-income residents are displaced from their communities by climate change threats and neighborhood improvements that drive up rents

For more information on suggested project criteria and other design recommendations for the National Climate Bank, please see the following reports on the reference page; *Florida Future Fund, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Across Florida, tate Future Funds: Jumpstarting Investments in Low-Carbon And Resilient Energy and Transportation Infrastructure*, *Three Bold Actions Congress Should Take to Equitably Address Weather and Climate Disasters*.

3. **One of the hearing witnesses, Michael Shellenberger, testified that nuclear power is "the safest way to make electricity." Can you comment on some of the environmental justice concerns around nuclear power in the United States, including the history of uranium mining?**

Nuclear energy is fading in importance globally. The peak in nuclear power's share of global electricity generation was 17.5 percent in 1996. Since then, this fraction has steadily declined reaching 10.1 percent in 2018 and the downward trend is expected to continue. The most important reason for the decline is that nuclear plants are no longer financially viable. In the last decade, it has become clear that not just constructing new reactors, but just operating one has ceased to make economic sense. This is because alternatives to nuclear energy, in particular renewable sources of electricity like wind and solar energy, have become drastically cheaper. It is for this reason that many utilities in the United States have required government subsidies to keep operating. Nuclear plants have a long track record of proving more expensive than initially projected. New nuclear reactor designs too are likely to be much more expensive in reality than what studies project. What are called Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) start off with an economic disadvantage because they lose out on economies of scale. SMR proponents hope that this can be compensated through mass manufacture and learning, but even under optimistic assumptions about the rates of learning, hundreds if not thousands of SMRs would have to be constructed before they break even in costs with large reactors, which are themselves not economical.

These economic challenges add to other well-known problems associated with nuclear energy, in particular, the absence of any demonstrated solutions to managing radioactive waste in the long run and the potential for catastrophic accidents. No reactor design is immune to these problems. Efforts to ameliorate one of these problems typically makes other problems worse. Finally, inasmuch as intermittent renewables such as solar photovoltaics and wind turbines are becoming a more important part of the electricity supply, technologies like nuclear power that are best suited for baseload power are going to become more redundant. Instead, the need is for flexible sources of power and storage capacity. For all these reasons, and more, it does not make sense to embark on nuclear energy.

The legacy of nuclear power plants in the United States also speaks to environmental injustice; from sourcing of the uranium, to siting of the plant, to disposal of the waste. Nuclear Power Plants (NPP) and the subsequent toxic nuclear waste cause "transgenerational justice issues of unprecedented duration in comparison to any other industry" (Dean Kyne and Bob Bolin 2016 p.1). Indigenous communities have borne the brunt of nuclear power's infrastructure in the form of the uranium mining, nuclear test sites and the disposal of nuclear waste which have left a legacy of pollution and public health harm in these environmental justice communities.

Please see the ***Reference Page*** for additional information.

4. **How can Congress best solicit the input and feedback from environmental justice communities on climate and clean energy policy? What would the ideal stakeholder engagement process look like during the development of legislation?**

Having a variety of opportunities for stakeholder engagement is important to solicit input and feedback from environmental justice communities. These opportunities should include systems to support stakeholder engagement in places where there is little to no technology. Opportunities for verbal and written feedback, as well as a variety of public meeting times during and outside of business hours are helpful. Information should also be provided in language accessible to the communities of interest and sufficient time should be allocated for public comments and feedback. Processes like those used to elicit input for the House Select Committee's majority staff report and Congressman McEachin and Chairman Grijalva's EJ For All Act are both great examples of how to engage stakeholders in legislative processes. These processes were interactive, took on multiple forms, were conducted with enough early consultation to allow for productive and meaningful discussions and included the feedback given from stakeholders into the policy design. Often stakeholders are only given an opportunity for feedback when a draft is completed, but having a more interactive process, with early consultation and a wide breadth of input supports a wider stakeholder engagement and ultimately a stronger policy.

Please see the ***Reference Page*** for additional information for the benefits of participatory policy making.

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