



Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms

Testimony for the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, “Building Climate Resilient Communities”

Distinguished members of the Committee,

I am a native Atlantan – born and raised in this great City. Atlanta is at the center of a metropolitan area of six million people. It is often said that “all roads lead to Atlanta,” and if you visit, you will be faced with that harsh reality when you hit our now-infamous, bumper-to-bumper traffic. It is a visual reminder of just how concentrated our population has become. In fact, 83 percent of Americans now live in urban centers. As such, cities like Atlanta can serve as a microcosm of issues affecting the entire country – issues like climate change.

Over the past year, we have all faced unprecedented challenges. A global pandemic, punctuated by a racial justice reckoning, an economic downturn, spikes in crime, and a once-in-a-lifetime election. No one escaped 2020 unscathed, and for that reason, many have called COVID-19 “the great equalizer.” But that isn’t true at all.

In fact, COVID has only exacerbated the vast inequities that exist within our society. Inequities that are further inflamed by a climate crisis that disproportionately affects our most vulnerable communities. So as we make the much-needed turn toward recovery, and we think about what it means to “build back better,” we cannot ignore the role that climate justice *must* play in our plans for the future.

This committee understands better than anyone how complex these issues truly are. Almost every challenge we face in the Mayor’s office – whether it is infrastructure, unemployment, affordable housing or transportation – can be connected to climate change. Which is why the solution must be as intersectional as the problem.

When I became Mayor of Atlanta, I set forth my vision for One Atlanta – a more affordable, resilient and equitable city for all. Central to that vision are collaborative, bold, innovative ideas that address climate change, create economic opportunity, and confront injustice head on.

That is why we:

- Committed to 100 percent Clean Energy by 2035 and sustainable food access to as many residents as possible
- Established a community-led Clean Energy Advisory Board,
- And joined the American Cities Climate Challenge

Work like this requires targeted investments in American cities to build out our nation’s sustainable infrastructure, to create well-paying jobs, and to support a resilient, clean energy future. In any infrastructure and economic recovery package we urge you to:

- Prioritize and expand programs where funds flow directly to cities from the federal government.
- Prioritize local government-led processes for federal funds that flow to the states to improve inclusivity and accountability.
- Ensure that federal programs and funding prioritize disadvantaged communities and allow sufficient administrative and implementation flexibility to meet local needs.
- Ensure that federal spending is accompanied by workforce standards that prioritize job quality and equitable access to well-paying high road careers.

Cities face specific challenges unique to their socio-geographical areas, and therefore require flexible funding - direct grants, block grants, etc. - that allow cities to address their distinct challenges efficiently and innovatively, while remaining accountable to grant requirements.

I sit before you today in my official capacity as Mayor of Atlanta. But first and foremost, I am a mother - a mother of four children with asthma. I know firsthand how climate change can affect real people in their everyday lives.

This is not an esoteric problem that we face as elected officials. It is real-world crisis that has already hit home for people around the world. Passage of the American Jobs Plan, including direct support to cities, will build a more equitable and resilient country. Your action will save lives.

Thank you.