



To the Joint House and Senate Democratic Committee,

Thank you for the invitation to speak about putting climate justice at the center of the People's Budget, a topic close to my heart. I am Bishop Dwayne Royster, Executive Director of POWER Interfaith. POWER is a multi-faith, multi-racial movement, that builds racial and economic justice on a liveable planet. Our Climate Justice and Jobs team is working with constituents and other organizations across the state on clean energy and just transition base-building, policies, and advocacy.

We believe that the budget is a Moral Document - it should direct and fund the programs that increase all communities' quality of life. The budget should be a moral compass that is an expression of the values we care about in our society. The budget should direct resources towards the common good to build a world where everyone can breathe fresh air, drink clean water, educate our children, access medical care and have a healthy livelihood.

We know that the communities that have faced the most burden from climate and racial injustice are the same communities targeted by the dirty fossil fuel economy for placement of toxic industry and waste. We have witnessed this year the devastating collision of COVID and climate crisis in a society of extreme inequality with those living in the most polluted areas getting the sickest and dying the most. It is imperative that a People's Budget repair these past harms and prioritize investment in environmental justice communities which are predominantly Black, Brown, Indigenous, low-income, and marginalized.

A People's Budget that focuses on the environment can invest in communities in ways that are both good for the environment and for the communities as we face climate change collectively. Such investments might include funding tree canopies in heat deserts, green space development, green water infrastructure, coal and other hazardous waste clean up, such as cleaning lead and asbestos toxins out of public schools, monitoring air and water quality and cumulative pollution burdens, green and renewable infrastructure with workforce development, investments in energy efficiency and solarization for low income housing, etc. I want to emphasize the need for dedicated funds to monitor the overall well-being of environmental justice communities, as defined by the Department of Environmental Protection. These are just some ways that we can both invest in communities and clean our environment through A People's Budget with a strong green justice focus.

A People's Budget with Climate Justice at its center can facilitate interdepartmental work that incorporates environmental considerations into sanitation, public transportation, housing, health, department of environmental protection, etc. It is an opportunity to work together towards common ends.

A People's Budget addressing the threat of Climate Crisis and the opportunity of a regenerative economy should feature a number of things. This budget should feature a just transition for both workers and communities tied to the fossil fuel industry, such as local governments that depend on the fossil fuel tax base for public institutions such as libraries and schools. We can look to examples like Colorado who are starting an Office of a Just Transition to support communities in deciding their future in the clean energy and other sectors. Budget commitments should work towards cleaning our

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environment and supporting new jobs, that are proven to increase state GDP and lower greenhouse gas emissions. The cost of this transition must not be put on those who are the most impacted by the fossil fuel economy or those with the least resources. PA is a national leader in energy generation and the 5th highest carbon polluter in the country. We can and we must move towards renewables, which can be supported by a People's Budget.

We need to enlist the moral imagination of our leaders to put People and Planet first and not Profit. We have to stop putting jobs vs. the environment and change the narrative to one that recognizes that all people can be part of transitioning our fossil fuel economy to one that is sustainable and regenerative. What do I mean by regenerative? A regenerative economy, as defined by allies at the United Frontlines Table, "is based on ecological restoration, community protection, equitable partnerships, justice and full and fair participatory processes... It values the dignity of work and humanity... supports collective and inclusive participatory governance..." Let us create a budget that addresses the interconnectedness of many issues. That is what it means to live into the Justice part of Environmental Justice or Climate Justice.

A budget that supports a green transition is an opportunity for community-driven development on multiple scales. It should include communities in shaping their futures away from a fossil fuel economy. This budget can be utilized to create a pathway that supports individualized counseling for workers, job creation in new industries that incorporate green economy principles, which can be used to address energy efficiency, clean air and water solutions, and generally increase the quality of life for all people, especially those left behind. Therefore this budget should be shaped by community-driven input on needs and solutions. Communities know best what they need, what they want, and what the stakes are when elected leaders ignore them. The budget can uplift these local solutions.

A People's Budget must address racial justice, economic justice, and climate justice in an interconnected way because the problems of racism, economic inequality and climate crisis are inseparable. We believe in a world where there are no Throw Away people and no Throw Away places. When we fail to create solutions with and for everyone, all of us are harmed and this ultimately costs the state way more in lost revenue, lost health, and lost community stability. Let's not be the next Texas with no heat or water for millions in the depth of winter and pandemic. We need real leadership and that leadership should be reflected in the priorities of our state budget.

How will you engage communities and imagine moving us towards Climate Justice through this budget?

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Bishop Dwayne Royster  
Executive Director

Learn more about the Climate Justice and Jobs team: <https://powerinterfaith.org/campaigns/climate-justice/>