

NJEJA ANNUAL REVIEW

2024 Edition



NEW JERSEY
ENVIRONMENTAL
JUSTICE ALLIANCE





2024 THEME

DISRUPTING METROPOLIS: AN EJ MANIFESTO

“

If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it.

”

— Zora Neale Hurston

“Metropolis” represents the concentration of industry and capital. Metropolis is not just a physical space—it is a vision of the world imposed upon us. A vision where “progress” means more highway expansions, polluting facilities, and legal loopholes that choke our air and contaminate our water.

From North Jersey to the Jersey Shore, low-wealth Communities of Color are being suffocated by a calculated disregard for who gets sick, who breathes clean air, and who makes decisions.

But we will not be silent. To disrupt Metropolis is to challenge the very systems and structures that keep our communities in a state of perpetual harm. It is to reject false solutions and narratives that reinforce environmental destruction as the price we pay for where we live. Disrupting Metropolis means embracing the call for Clean Air, Green Jobs, and Just Futures.

So let's come together and organize, remembering that disruption is not just about resistance; it's about healing and restoration, too. Join us in reimagining our cities as places where clean energy powers our homes, where abundant gardens replace vacant lots, where efficient transit systems connect us all, and where our communities have the resources and autonomy to thrive.



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Common Meadow Violet (Viola sororia)
- The official state flower of New Jersey since 1971



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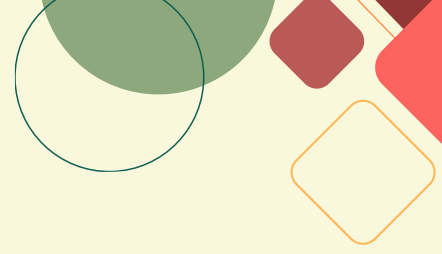
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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dearest Friends,

2024 has been quite a year for our communities and our country. I don't need to rehash the drama, the terror, and the fear that so many sleep and wake with. There is a deep discomfort gripping humanity. We must hear through the noise of the current moment. Our ecosystem (of which we are a part) is sending clear messages if we would only listen – and act. It's important that our vision and work grow in proportion to the threats we face.

Climate change is real and is already disrupting the patterns of our lives here in NJ. This is not the time to fold, but rather to fortify. By increasing our work in the communities most impacted by the legacy of industrial pollution in the air, land, and water, we also improve our chances of resilience in the face of unknown changes and challenges in the years ahead.

We here at NJEJA are part of a multi-generational legacy to bring to light the causes and the impacts of policies and practices that harm the health and well-being of NJ communities, specifically those already vulnerable to racism, segregation, discrimination, and deportation. We believe that this critical work serves to protect and improve the quality of life for each and every person in our state.

We were fortunate to experience a period of time during which our EJ work and principles were prioritized on Capitol Hill. That moment may have passed, but the anchor organizations of the environmental and climate justice movement, and those allied in true support, remain.

Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for supporting our vision. Thank you for putting community first. We must prioritize the people. That is true democracy.

Melissa Miles
Executive Director



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & THOUGHT PARTNERSHIP

In 2024, we organized alongside EJ communities throughout the state to support their advocacy efforts, understanding how vital strong partnerships are in **building our collective power**. Whether through hosting educational sessions together, canvassing across neighborhoods, collaborating on technical assistance, or marching in the streets arm in arm, the movement to disrupt *Metropolis* needs us all. When the days, nights, weeks, months, and years seem long and the successes slow, let us remember what is possible when we come together to achieve **a shared vision for equity and justice**.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



WE ACT

This year, we began partnering with the **WE ACT Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (WE ACT TCTAC)**. By providing free technical assistance, educational resources, and access to environmental justice, grassroots organizing, and energy justice expertise, we are working to strengthen our collective advocacy with communities across New Jersey.

We are happy to announce that our partners at the **Native American Advancement Corporation, Center for Environmental Transformation, Operation Grow, Friends of Metcalf Park, and East Trenton Collaborative** were selected to join the TCTAC's Community Voices program launched in the fall, helping to determine environmental, climate, and energy justice priorities for New Jersey.

Beginning in the spring, the TCTAC team, including NJEJA and other steering committee partners, will work with Community Voices members to deliver in-person trainings and workshops that complement their organizations' existing focus areas.



WE ACT

Native American Advancement Corporation



WE ACT

Center for Environmental Transformation



WE ACT

Operation Grow

East Trenton Collaborative



WE ACT

COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS ON WASTE ISSUES

Understanding the diverse needs of communities across New Jersey, this year, we launched our Community Listening Sessions on Waste Justice series. Partnering with organizations in Camden, Newark, Bridgeton, and Whitesboro, these sessions provided space for residents to learn about New Jersey's waste infrastructure and discuss the disproportionate impact and presence of waste facilities in communities of color.

Together, we are collaboratively envisioning a future where environmental justice not only includes waste justice but prioritizes a more holistic approach to developing and protecting healthy communities.



Camden Listening Session co-hosted with Center For Environmental Transformation



Newark Listening Session co-hosted with Ironbound Community Corporation



Salem Listening Session co-hosted with Native American Advancement Corporation



Whitesboro Listening Session co-hosted with Whitesboro Historical Foundation, 4 Asbury Park CPC, and the Whitesboro Preservation Project



Map Author: Chelsea Watson

Beyond building upon our 2024 sessions with follow-up workshops and educational opportunities, we plan to host additional Listening Sessions throughout the state on both waste justice and other environmental justice topics in 2025.

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Time for Turbines 7



Time for Turbines

In October, we attended the seventh annual Time for Turbines in Atlantic City, where we heard from labor leaders, government officials, and developers about the progress the offshore wind industry has made in the state. Staff from our Organizing and Green Careers teams spoke on a panel focused on Workforce Development and Supply Chain, emphasizing the need for a community-centered approach in developing offshore wind to ensure environmental justice and equity are at the forefront of the emerging sector.

Rutgers Racial Justice Summit

This fall, our staff spoke at Rutgers-Camden's second annual Racial Justice Summit, Fighting for the Now, Hopeful for the Future: Living and Breathing Camden. Our Organizing team spoke on a panel centered around the intersection of housing and environmental justice in Camden, highlighting the shared experiences, challenges, and conditions that EJ communities have throughout the state and nationwide.



Benjamin Horner, Rutgers University

CEED Environmental Health and Justice Summit

Members of our staff and board took part in the 7th Annual Health and Justice Summit hosted by Rutgers University's Center for Environmental Exposures and Disease. In a panel on the health and environmental impacts of plastic pollution, we emphasized the associated environmental justice issues, highlighting the adverse health impacts that EJ communities face from the production to disposal of plastic products.



CEED





COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: TIMIKA LINDSAY

As part of NJEJA's Community Spotlight series, Director of Organizing Oriana Holmes-Price interviews Paulsboro community organizer Timika Lindsay. Timi shares personal stories from growing up in an environmental justice community. They discuss the power of mobilizing residents for clean air initiatives and addressing climate change impacts in marginalized areas. The series highlights local leaders working to advance environmental justice across New Jersey.



Oriana: What is your EJ story? How did you get into this line of work?

Timi: I'm Timi Lindsay, a Paulsboro, New Jersey native and CEO of Anchor Leadership Solutions. My work focuses on leadership strategy at the executive level, but environmental justice became personal for me when I started attending meetings about offshore wind projects in New Jersey. The projects were happening in my backyard, but I wasn't seeing the benefits in Paulsboro. Companies said they were helping, but I wasn't convinced. I started digging deeper and realized EJ has been part of my life all along—I just hadn't connected the dots. Growing up, my family faced major health challenges because of the industries surrounding us—Mobile Oil, Shell, DuPont, and more. My dad had sinus surgeries linked to poor air quality, and my mom, uncle, and aunt all passed away from cancer, living on the same block. Our doctor even advised us to move. This isn't just work for me—it's personal.

Oriana: What does environmental justice mean to you?

Timi: It's personal. It's about dismantling systemic barriers that hurt communities like mine. My dad is 87, my great-nephew is two, and they both deserve clean air, safe water, good schools, and access to basic needs like grocery stores. Paulboro struggles with poverty, contaminated water, old schools, and poor infrastructure. Many residents are renters, and we don't even have a pharmacy. These issues lead to health problems like kidney disease and cancer. Environmental justice means fighting for change so our kids don't face the same struggles. It's about making sure our community has the resources to thrive.





Oriana: What are you doing now to help Paulsboro?

Timi: I'm focused on rebuilding trust and educating residents. We're gathering data on pollution, warning people about contaminated fishing areas, and encouraging local entrepreneurship. Paulsboro has empty retail spaces that could be thriving businesses, but residents need help getting started. I also push for civic engagement. Decisions affecting us—like the port—are made at local, state, and federal levels. Residents need to understand how these systems work and how to hold industries accountable. The port's been here for over 10 years, but the local jobs they promised haven't materialized. Community Benefits Agreements could help ensure they follow through.

Oriana: What challenges are you facing?

Timi: A big challenge is finding a space for community meetings. Without funding, I rely on word-of-mouth and attending church, Chamber of Commerce, and council meetings to spread the word. If we had a space, we could host programs like senior activities during the day and youth classes in the evening—on financial literacy, home buying, or tutoring. I have connections with people willing to teach, but we need resources. Another challenge is trust. Years of neglect have made people skeptical. It takes time and consistency to rebuild that.

Oriana: If you could give any advice to someone new to environmental justice activism, what would it be?

Timi: Start where you are, with what you have. You don't need to have it all figured out to begin. I started by asking questions at meetings. Learn as much as you can, and don't be afraid to challenge the status quo. Also, surround yourself with people who care. Find mentors, join groups, and stay connected with others who share your vision. This work can be hard and isolating, but you don't have to do it alone. Lastly, don't get discouraged by setbacks. Progress takes time. Celebrate the small wins, and remember why you started.

Oriana: What's your vision for Paulsboro?

Timi: I want Paulsboro to be a place where people don't just survive—they thrive. That means clean air and water, better schools, jobs, and a strong sense of community. To get there, we need changes led by the people living here. By empowering residents and holding industries accountable, I believe Paulsboro can become the place we deserve.



MAKING WAVES IN THE MEDIA

N.J. Reparations Council to Tackle Environmental Justice

This article highlights the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice's Reparations Council. Their Environmental Justice Committee, which NJEJA sits on, will present findings on how environmental policies have disproportionately harmed Black communities in New Jersey, leading to health issues like asthma and cancer.



Ande Richards

Feds Fire Up Electric Infrastructure for Trucks Along I-95 Corridor

A \$248.9 million federal grant will fund electric truck charging stations along the I-95 corridor. NJEJA Executive Director Melissa Miles is quoted, emphasizing the grant's importance for reducing pollution and advancing EJ in communities like Newark's Ironbound.



AP Photo / Eric Gay

Methane Gas Plant Plan Piles on Years of Neglect in Newark, Organizers Say

In August, we hosted a community listening session with the Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC), where we discussed the proposed PSVSC plant and the abundance of polluting facilities that have been intentionally placed in the Ironbound. This article covers the event.



Matt Kadosh

How We're Building a Movement for Climate Justice in New Jersey

In April, we attended Food and Water Watch's New Jersey Climate Action Gathering. NJEJA Director of Policy Brooke Helmick was a keynote speaker, underscoring the need for strong partnerships with one another in advancing climate and environmental justice.



Food & Water Watch

Addressing Waste Justice in New Jersey

Published in collaboration with NJEJA and Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), this op-ed highlights the inequities in New Jersey's waste infrastructure, where polluting facilities disproportionately harm low-income and BIPOC communities, and emphasizes the need for systemic change.



Angel Perez

Environmental Justice Coalition Commends New EPA Soot Pollution Standards – Still Calls for Greater Enforcement to Protect Black & Brown Lives Harmed by Dirty Air

NJEJA is a member of The Clean Air for the Long Haul coalition, which praised the EPA's updated soot pollution standards while urging stronger enforcement and monitoring to protect overburdened communities disproportionately harmed by particulate matter pollution.



Where EPA Falls Short, States Lead the Way on Addressing Pollution Burden in Disadvantaged Communities

This article highlights our pivotal role in advancing New Jersey's groundbreaking Environmental Justice Law, which incorporates cumulative impact analysis to protect overburdened communities from additional pollution burdens.



An Earth Day Reminder: N.J. Must Move Faster Toward Clean Energy | Opinion

In this op-ed, the author underscores our organization's advocacy for New Jersey's Environmental Justice Law and essential role in the transition to 100% clean electricity by 2035 to reduce harm in historically burdened communities.



LISTEN: Ana Baptista on Supporting Environmental Justice Movement Building in Academia

Dr. Ana Baptista, NJEJA Board Member, discusses her work in academia and its role in driving systemic change for environmental justice. Tune into this timely discussion!



Environmental Health News

GALLERY VIEW: LIGHTS CAMERA ACTION



March For Clean Air

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TEDC



NJ Future Smart Growth Awards



Counterstream Media Story Salon at NYC Climate Week

Chess Jakobs for Counterstream Media



"Better Worlds Ahead: Realizing Our Brighter Climate Futures" at NYC Climate Week

TEDC



Roadmap to 100 Summit



Operation Grow's Halloween Fest



Ironbound EJ Tour with EJNCF Platform Members



“U.S. Climate Leadership: Equity and Justice in the Green Transition”



New Jersey NAACP State Conference



DC Advocacy and Education Day

Climate Justice Alliance



2024 NJEJA Staff Retreat



NJ Climate Action Gathering

Food and Water Watch



March for Clean Air



Whitesboro Historic Preservation Project Community Meeting

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

This year, with the development of our Green Careers team, we have been working to create a container program for our workforce development initiatives which are designed to incubate careers in solar, offshore wind, building decarbonization, and energy efficiency. Through education, training, and youth development, we are building a network of resources for community members from K-12 to adulthood, ensuring the statewide movement toward renewable energy includes every NJ resident, regardless of zip code.

OFFSHORE WIND TRAINING PROGRAM



Through a grant offered by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, we created our **Offshore Wind Workforce Training Program** in collaboration with Soulful Synergy and the Newark Workforce Development Board.

Offered in three cohorts, the program instills skills in offshore wind construction and professional development, and connects participants to the movement for environmental justice.

Our training partner, Soulful Synergy, has successfully implemented the vision for an equipped workforce from communities where these opportunities are not always readily available. This summer, we held a graduation for our second cohort of 20 students, having trained 43 community members since the program's inception in 2023. Together, we are strengthening and diversifying New Jersey's offshore wind workforce, making sure everyone gets a seat at the table in the green economy.



NJ ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION AND LITERACY HUB

Funded by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, we are building a statewide EJ network in collaboration with Isles Inc., Native American Advancement Corporation, and OCEAN Inc. Along with our fellow hub leaders, we conducted outreach to local community organizations, directly engaging with residents in EJ communities to participate.



Partnering with Kean’s Center for the Urban Environment and the NJDEP, we are developing an EJ curriculum to be disseminated at seminars next year, providing basic EJ information and a blueprint for navigating governmental processes. With our hub leaders, we are increasing capacity in EJ communities and empowering residents to advocate for community-led change.

KEAN SCHOLARS ACADEMY

As part of this program, we have been developing monthly educational lessons for the Kean Scholars Academy (KSA). In these sessions, we’ve explored topics around climate justice, migration, environmental and climate policy, EJ, and knowledge empowerment.

Within the Scholars Academy, a select group of students make up the Emerging Environmental Justice Leaders Advisory Council, which meets bi-weekly to expand upon the lessons from our KSA sessions, discuss solutions to the climate crisis, and plan a youth climate justice festival for next summer, covering topics such as lead in water and fast fashion.



OUR POLICY AGENDA

NJEJA has over two decades of experience fighting bad environmental policies and practices. We've also been working hard to co-create a vision with communities throughout the state, focusing on the issues most affecting them, including energy production, waste management, transportation, and air pollution mitigation. To do this, we uplift strong EJ-centered policy and mobilize communities through education and empowerment. At the same time, we work to educate decision-makers on the risks of harmful environmental legislation to the health and safety of New Jersey communities.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2024

PORTS AND FREIGHT



Moving Forward Network

This year saw the continuation of our ports, transportation, and freight work. In the spring, we attended a rail yard tour in Chicago with our partners at the Moving Forward Network (MFN), learning about progress on electrification. Later that summer, we joined them in supporting California's work on electrification, learning best practices that can be emulated in New Jersey.

In December, NJEJA joined MFN and members of the DOT and the White House to discuss sustainable freight work. Additionally, we have continued our goods movement work in partnership with the Coalition for Healthy Ports and Clean Air for the Long Haul, attending Hill Advocacy Days, participating in a meeting with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and celebrating additional funding to decrease emissions at the Port of Newark.



Moving Forward Network





Food & Water Watch

CLEAN ENERGY STANDARD

For the past six years, the New Jersey Clean Energy Standard (CES) legislation has been stalled in the NJ State House. In November of last year, NJEJA and the Ironbound Community Corporation joined Earthjustice in calling for amendments to the Clean Energy Standard to ensure that clean energy does not contribute further to air emissions. Following testimony by NJEJA and other grassroots EJ groups to the NJ State Senate Energy and Environment Committee in the spring, the CES was successfully passed this year with some key environmental justice amendments.

POWER PLANT RULE

NJEJA and our partners at the Tishman Environment and Design Center, Center for Earth, Energy, and Democracy (CEED), and Kean University were involved in co-writing joint comments urging the EPA to exclude dangerous technologies such as carbon capture from the power plant rules. In May, we hosted a webinar for community members and organizations on engaging in the EPA's comment period. That month, thanks to the advocacy of environmental justice communities, the EPA excluded hydrogen co-firing from the first half of the rule. We also submitted comments and participated in an in-person convening in Washington, D.C. on the second half of the rule, which has yet to come out.



Surfrider Foundation

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

Since New Jersey's 2020 legislation combating single-use plastic pollution from bags, foam, and straws, NJEJA and our partners in waste advocacy have been co-leading efforts to continue the law's success through community engagement, presentations, and education.

This year, we testified on the importance of closing loopholes in producer responsibility and expressed our opposition to chemical recycling. In the fall, we attended the Surfrider Foundation's annual strategy meeting to learn about plastics policies and approaches from partners nationwide.

We continue to highlight the dangers of plastic pollution throughout its life cycle, emphasizing the need for waste reduction strategies to decrease the amount of materials being sent to incinerators. Building upon our waste justice listening sessions, we have been hosting storytelling sessions with community members, providing them with space to craft testimonies on their experiences with plastic and waste-related injustices that can be shared with decision-makers.



LAUNCHING MER



In June, NJEJA, in partnership with Kean University's Center for the Urban Environment, launched our Mandatory Emissions Reductions (MER) work through an in-person roundtable discussion with social justice groups from across the state, including labor, faith, and on-the-ground environmental justice organizations.

Later in the year, attendees reconvened to develop a working group with members from community-based organizations throughout New Jersey. The group is developing the statewide rollout of the MER framework into next year, working to advance the platform's goals and bring back environmental justice education to their members and communities.



Work with regional communities to investigate the potential dangers of carbon capture and hydrogen co-firing

Continue supporting community engagement efforts, such as listening sessions, for the Environmental Justice Law

Further our community education with the development of fact sheets, papers, and webinars

2025 POLICY PRIORITIES

REFLECTING ON 2024

In early September, our team gathered in the Catskill Mountains for a two-day retreat to reflect, connect, and strengthen our collective vision for the future. Through community-building activities like navigating an obstacle course using designated “safe” stepping stones and gathering tender for a campfire, we deepened trust and gained valuable insights into how we work together to achieve shared goals. These experiences underscored the importance of collaboration and understanding in advancing our mission.

Environmental Justice is rooted in the fight led by communities to protect ourselves from environmental harm and injustice. This legacy remains central to our work. While we confront systemic pollution and inequities, we must also build a new, just, clean, and green economy—one where workers and communities are valued, not expendable. The momentum driving this movement is unstoppable.

The joy of seeing communities achieve tangible improvements in our environment and economic stability is immeasurable. Together, with our partners and the communities we serve, we are building toward a just, equitable, and sustainable future, one step at a time.

In Solidarity,

NJEJA





ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I see environmental justice organizers as real-life superheroes and I take every opportunity I can to celebrate them. The main figure represents not one person but the protective spirit in us that seeks to protect life and usher humanity to a brighter future. They are A Green Warrior who has turned their back on the toxic systems of the old world and is facing brighter, illuminating an infrastructure of sustainability and community health. Behind them are the ominous red skies, trucks and toxic air pollution, incinerators, freight ships, and plastic bottles in the waters. The oppressive wheels of ill-gotten gains. But through advocacy and resilience, we can replace that vision with a much brighter one that prioritizes the health, vitality, and safety of our communities. Thank you, NJEJA, for all the important work you are doing to protect communities and the planet. I hope you feel deeply celebrated in this artwork.

– *Crystal Clarity*







Design by Christian Tandazo.



NEW JERSEY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ALLIANCE

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