



CAPE COD
CLIMATE
CHANGE
COLLABORATIVE

Energy Justice: A Position Statement *Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative*

Changes in the climate are not affecting all Americans equally. News outlets constantly report stories of the disproportionate impacts these changes are having on low-income communities and communities of color. Cape Cod and the Islands are not immune to these inequities, and the social and economic structures undergirding them. The Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative (Climate Collaborative) recognizes these injustices and is committed to redressing them. While access to clean energy is only one of many climate-related issues that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, we believe addressing energy injustice is a starting place where the Climate Collaborative can effectuate change. This position statement presents a set of operating principles specific to redressing inequalities in access to affordable clean energy and outlines a set of policy commitments designed to directly address the challenge of distributing clean energy resources equitably among Cape and Island residents.

Introduction

Ever since fossil fuels became the primary sources of energy used to heat and cool homes and power our automobiles, disparities in access to those resources and in the burdens imposed by their adverse impacts have become obvious and well documented. Low-income households pay at least twice the percentage of their household incomes on energy as do median-income families.¹ Low-income housing and housing in communities of color is often less energy efficient than the housing of families with greater means. These families are more likely to rent rather than to own their homes, and if they do own, may not have access to the equity needed to purchase clean energy sources like solar panels and heat pumps. They may live further from their workplaces and have limited access to affordable public transportation.

At the same time, many disadvantaged communities are polluted disproportionately by fossil fuel-dependent energy infrastructure, and by the negative public health consequences that result. As the country works to reverse carbon and toxic pollution, we must ensure that these communities are positioned to benefit directly from the opportunities that will be created. Massive investments will be made in the transition to clean energy sources over the next several decades. Given the nature of the U.S. economic system, significant financial profits will be made along the way. How can we ensure that some of the benefits of this transition accrue to low-income residents and

¹ <https://www.ase.org/blog/low-income-households-pay-lot-energy-efficiency-can-help-cut-costs>

residents of color? The Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative is dedicated to insuring equity in the distribution of clean energy to the residents of the Cape and Islands. This position statement provides a set of guideposts on the path to that important goal.²

The Position of the Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative Board

The Climate Change Collaborative Board is guided by the following principles related to energy justice:³

- a basic amount of clean energy should be affordable for and available to all Cape and Islands residents.
- long-term clean energy sustainability requires investment in energy conservation and efficiency.
- increasing local ownership and investments in energy resources can stem the flow of energy dollars out of low-income communities.
- residents and renters of public or subsidized housing should have the same access to clean energy programs as homeowners do⁴.
- jobs in the clean energy industry should pay a living-wage.
- training programs designed to prepare workers for jobs in clean energy industries should make special efforts to recruit participants from low-income communities and communities of color.
- representatives of residents living in low income communities and of communities of color should be well represented in discussions of energy needs and energy transition policy alternatives.

Energy Justice Policy Commitments

Education: The Climate Collaborative will take steps to educate the public about past inequities in the distribution of energy resources.

Advocacy: The Climate Collaborative will seek to hold clean energy providers accountable for equitable energy distribution in the future.

Energy Conservation and Efficiency: The Climate Collaborative will advocate for energy conservation and efficiency policies and practices on the Cape and Islands with high probability of reducing energy costs for low income residents.

² For a detailed analysis of what constitutes equitable climate policy see <https://equitablegrowth.org/a-plan-for-equitable-climate-policy-in-the-united-states/>

³ These principles have been adapted from the work of the Energy Democracy Alliance in New York State. For more information on the work of the Alliance go to <https://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Prioritizing-Equity-in-our-Clean-Energy-Future.pdf>

⁴ Regardless of accessibility, upfront costs of clean energy measures/programs are often a barrier to participation.

Local Energy Production Ownership: The Climate Collaborative will advocate for financial mechanisms that encourage local energy production specifically to reduce the cost of clean energy for low-income residents^{5,6}.

Clean Energy Programs for Residents who Rent or Live in Public/Subsidized Housing: The Climate Collaborative will work with municipalities and local governmental and non-profit organizations to encourage the inclusion of solar panels and air source heat pumps on new construction of public/subsidized housing, as well as existing structures.⁷

Jobs in Clean Energy Industries: The Climate Collaborative will advocate for wages paid to clean energy workers (solar, wind, energy conservation) that start at a minimum of \$15/hr. and are pegged to annual changes in the cost of living on Cape Cod and the Islands.

Training Programs for Clean Energy Workers: The Climate Collaborative will advocate for dedicated outreach efforts by local and regional training programs (solar, wind, energy conservation) designed to reach members of low-income communities and communities of color.

Representation in Energy Transition Planning and Policy Development Efforts: In support of the above principles and policy commitments, the Climate Collaborative will strive to diversify its membership and governing board to include representatives of low-income communities and communities of color. The Collaborative will also seek to ensure that such representatives be included in other regional planning entities (Cape Cod Commission, Regional Transit Authority, etc.).

⁵ E.g., ownership of solar panels. Upfront costs and lack of home ownership make acquisition of solar arrays prohibitive for low-income residents. Ways to address these barriers may include (but are not limited to) the establishment of a green bank or other zero/low interest loan program, and/or providing solar incentives for low-income residents through energy efficiency programs.

⁶ Green banks are financial institutions designed to provide incentives to clean energy companies willing to make locally-generated electricity available to low-income customers at a reduced cost. For an example in Baltimore, MD of a green bank designed to make affordable clean energy available to low-income residents using community solar see <https://meetingoftheminds.org/social-equity-through-clean-energy-30837>

⁷ The SMART incentive program makes it possible for residents who don't own their homes to participate in low-income community solar projects to reduce their electric bills. For more about community solar and solar gardens see <https://solstice.us/solstice-blog/solar-gardens-community-clean-energy/>. The Climate Collaborative discourages the clearing of forested land to create space for solar arrays. For more information on the tension between large solar arrays and forest protection see the Position Statement at <https://capecodclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Forest-solar-position-final-11-14-19.pdf>