The second half of the legislative session in Albany is in full swing. What follows is a reasonably comprehensive review of the various pieces of pending legislation which we believe may be of particular interest to the faith community. We invite you to use this review as a reference as you make decisions about how you want to offer an informed your witness in the public square. We particularly bring to your attention actions on May 13 with House our Future in New York City, May 14 for Health Care, Workers Rights, Parole Reform and Universal Rent Reform, May 21 for Driver's Licenses for Immigrants, and May 28 for a hearing on single payer.

The New York State Council of Churches relies on the generosity of individuals, denominations, churches, unions, many other non-profit and for-profit organizations to provide the funding needed to carry out our ministries including doing advocacy and legislative reviews. We invite you to donate and most especially to purchase tickets and sponsorships for our Annual Dinner on May 29.

**ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER IS MAY 29**

Order tickets and sponsorships now for our Fourth Annual Awards and Fundraising Dinner to be held Wednesday, May 29 in Albany, NY. from 5:30 – 8:30 PM at St. Sophia’s Greek Orthodox Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, NY 12208. 5:30 to 6:30 PM is a reception with cash bar followed by dinner and awards presentations from 6:30 to 8:30 PM.

Tickets for the reception and dinner are $60 each, please be sure to make your meal selection at this link. Click here to purchase tickets and sponsorships

We ask that you please consider purchasing a sponsorship between $125 and $5,000 to support the New York State Council of Churches. Please submit ads by May 13, 2019 which will be published in an attractive awards booklet. Details including sizes of ads are available at the link above.

There is a place for listing additional names and meal choices on the form. Deadline for purchasing tickets is May 20, 2019. You may also send a check payable to New York State Council of Churches for either tickets or sponsorships (1580 Central Ave. Albany, NY 12205). Contact our office with any questions, office@nyscoc.org or call 518 436-9319.

We proudly present the following awardees from across New York State:

**CHAPLAINCY**

The Reverend Petero Sabune, Retired Chaplain, NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Kairos Prison Ministries

**ECUMENICAL**

The Reverend Ann Akers, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Port Jervis
The Reverend Aaron Baughman, Pastor, St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Port Jervis
Zachary Pearce, Deerpark Reformed Church, Port Jervis
We give thanks to the following organizations/individuals for the Sponsorships we have currently received and invite others to join them in support of the Council and its ministries.

**Visionary Level Sponsorship - $5000**
- Episcopal Diocese of New York
- Hotel Trades Council

**Empowerment Level Sponsorship - $1,000**
- 1199 SEIU
- New York Disaster Interfaith Services
- New York State Nurses Association

**Sustainer Level Sponsorship - $500**
- CSEA New York
- New Sanctuary Coalition
- New York State United Teachers
- Public Employees Federation

**Ally Level Sponsorship - $250**
- Benchmark Title Company, LLC
- Darius Shahinfar, Albany City Treasurer
- Greater Rochester Community of Churches
Legislative Review

HR1 and Restoration of the Voting Rights Act and Poor People’s Campaign

The New York State Council of Churches was pleased to organize visits for the New York delegation as part of Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington. One of our asks was to press the Senate to vote on HR1 which would restore voting rights for many Americans and make the ballot box much more accessible. HR1 includes restoration of the pre-clearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act which were struck down by the Supreme Court and referred to Congress for revision. Senator McConnell has made sure that voting rights, including pre-clearance, do not get consideration and be brought to the floor for a vote. The participants in Ecumenical Advocacy Days had a day long prayer vigil in Senator McConnell’s office as part of the lobby day associated with Ecumenical Advocacy Days.

New York, which is still a voter suppression state in spite of passage of overdue electoral reforms last January, would benefit from having some national pressure to further reform its voting practices. The Reverend Dr. William Barber recently spoke at Cathedral of St John the Divine about the urgent need to pass meaningful voter legislation in the Congress as part of the Poor People’s Campaign platform. Please stay tuned for more information actions in Washington sponsored by the Poor People’s Campaign in Washington June 16 to 18 and possibly June 12 to lift up the comprehensive platform. The Labor-Religion Coalition, the Poor People’s Campaign of New York along with the New York State Council of Churches will keep you apprised of more details as they emerge.

Immigration

SCAR ACT

The Council strongly supports passage of the SCAR Act: The Separation of Children Accountability Response Act by the end of session. We are urging you to contact both your Assembly Member and State Senator right away to urge them to be a co-sponsor. We understand that the SCAR Act will not move out of the committee in the Assembly chaired by
Assembly Member Ellen Jaffee, unless we can secure at least 25 more co-sponsors for SCAR. Here is a sample letter to the editor which explains the SCAR Act and which we invite you to adapt to your liking and send to your local paper.

Sample Letter

Dear

It has been a year since President Trump made official his "Zero Tolerance" immigration policy, giving a name to the horrific practice of immigrant family separation, which had been going on for months. A year later, questions remain: Why do we still not know with certainty how many parents and children were separated a year ago? Why do we still not know with certainty how many remain separated in New York State, let alone in the rest of the country?

To respond to these questions with action, faith leaders and their allies across New York State are calling on the state legislature to pass the SCAR Act: The Separation of Children Accountability Response Act. The SCAR Act calls for transparency from state-certified foster care agencies regarding how many separated and unaccompanied children are in their care at any given time.

The passing of the SCAR Act is only the beginning of a much-needed accountability process, requiring a bare minimum of transparency regarding the number of separated children detained in our state. It is a small, but necessary, first step to restoring these children to their families and to repairing a corrupted system. It is a replicable model for restoration and repair in all states.

New York has an opportunity to lead the United States on this issue. The trauma, fear, and neglect that these children have suffered is proof enough that Trump’s “Zero Tolerance” policy is a bad weed with poisonous fruit. All people of conscience must commit themselves to uprooting this weed in New York State and across the country. The SCAR Act is the first step.

Driver’s Licenses for Immigrants

According to the New York Immigration Coalition, “in the past weeks, we’ve had some huge wins in the fight to restore access to driver’s licenses! The New York Times editorial board endorsed Green Light legislation, and Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie announced his commitment to bring the bill to a vote in the Assembly. Now, all eyes turn to the Senate to follow the leadership of the Assembly and bring the measure to the floor.

Last week, the NYIC, affected individuals, and partner organizations rallied at the offices of Senate Majority Leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Deputy Leader, Senator Michael Gianaris, to demand that they support the legislation. Momentum is building across the state and we’re putting our organizing efforts in high gear to get the bill passed this session!”

Assembly Member Pat Fahy tells us that “Critical safety and security provisions are being addressed with proposed legislation to allow undocumented immigrants to apply for driver's licenses. Kudos to Assemblymember Marcos Crespo for being responsive to our concerns and a good partner during this process - thanks to Assemblymember John McDonald and Sheriff Craig D.Apple Sr. for their work on this as well.”

Green Light New York supports these amendments.
We strongly urge you to be in touch with your state senator and assembly member and ask them to support the Green Light bill. Democrat Senators on Long Island and some upstate Senators up state are more reticent to support the bill. They need special encouragement from the faith community.

There is a lobby day in favor of Driver’s Licenses on May 21. It will be particularly important that faith leaders be present and ask that they make a special effort. Here is the notice for the lobby day from Green Light NY.

Join the #GreenLightNY campaign in our FINAL PUSH to win #DriversLicensesNOW before the end of the 2019 legislative session in June! Register today at http://bit.ly/GL5-21 and stay tuned for more details about our program of activities. The political climate is rapidly changing so we ask for your flexibility in the nature of the action as well as our capacity to provide transportation. Please note that time indicated for this event represents the start and end time of our activities IN ALBANY. Bear in mind that each bus will depart at different times from various pickup locations across the state. All buses will leave Albany no later than 3:00.

Sanctuary

We celebrate that First Congregational Church of Ithaca became a Sanctuary Church. Click here for the coverage in the Ithaca Voice and here for Binghamton TV.

Farm Worker Rights

On May 14, there was an action in Albany in support of Farm Worker Rights. Intensive lobbying continues to ensure passage of the bill. Please contact The Reverend Richard Witt, Executive Director of Rural and Migrant Ministry about next steps at RCYrilwitt@aol.com or the Rural and Migrant Ministry website at ruralmigrantministyry.org.

HEALTH CARE AND WORKERS RIGHTS

Multi-Union Lobby Day. May 14

Please join the New York State Nurses Association and other unions for the multi union lobby day on May 14 in support of health care (including single payer) and worker’s rights (including safe staffing) Click here to register.

Single Payer Hearing, May 28

There will be a joint Assembly and Senate Hearing on Single Payer on May 28th. Click here for more information. Other hearings are in the process of being planned in other locations around the state.

CHILD CARE

A Mother’s Day invitation from our partner, Fiscal Policy Institute:

Just in time for Mother's Day, here are some social media to highlight a gift that New York moms really need - smart tax policy!
Fiscal Policy Institute is happy to share information and graphics from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to highlight the need for the Working Families Tax relief Act strengthening the EITC and improving the Child Tax Credit.

Use this link or check @FiscalPolicy00 to simply retweet.

Here are some fast facts:

- NY’s low-income working mothers struggle to move ahead or even to stay afloat, as their costs continue to rise faster than their pay, making it harder for them to provide for themselves and their children.

- The bill — known as the Working Families Tax Relief Act — would help 23 million mothers across the country pay the bills while boosting their children’s life prospects.

- The proposal would strengthen the highly successful Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), enabling working mothers to keep more of their hard-earned pay. And, it would improve the Child Tax Credit (CTC), helping millions of more kids in low- and middle-income families get a good start in life.

- In NYS, the proposal would boost the incomes of 1.3 mothers and benefit 2.7 NY children – with the benefits shared broadly across racial groups.

Blog post: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities


Best wishes for a wonderful weekend!

HOUSING

1. House Our Future Campaign

The House our Future Campaign, formed to urge Mayor de Blasio to commit to creating 30,000 (10% of the total) housing units for homeless households in his 300,000 unit plan, urges you to attend a rally at 100 Gold Street at 9 AM on May 13 with a march to city hall at 9:30 for a housing hearing at 10. Over 100 faith leaders backed this campaign. Here is a supporting editorial by The Reverend Robert Foltz Morrison, Executive Presbyter of the New York Presbytery and The Reverend Peter Cook of the New York State Council of Churches in the Riverdale Press in The Bronx.

2. Universal Rent Control

After a successful launch of rent reform campaign in Harlem at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in April, there will also be a housing justice for all rally and lobby day on May 14 in support of stronger rent laws. Many buses leave from New York City at 7:00 AM. Register here to get on the bus or call 212 979-6958.

One of the more disputed bills in the rent law reform package is a “good cause eviction” measure (which would apply everywhere in the state) that would prevent any landlord in the state from
evicting tenants unless they break the law, cause a nuisance or don’t pay rent, while also setting limits on rent increases. Click here for an article in City State which describes the issue.

We think this is a reasonable proposal which should not hinder further housing development as the critics contend.

Click here and here for coverage of the Assembly hearing in New York City along with links describing the different bills associated with rent reform.

Coverage for the Albany hearing can be found here and here and coverage of hearings in Rochester by clicking here.

Homes for Seniors in New York City

According to City and State “Last June Mayor de Blasio pledged $500 million to build new housing for low-income seniors, but nearly a year later, it turns out that the money wasn’t in the budget, the plan wasn’t new and the senior housing envisioned hasn’t been built or financed, the Times writes.” The Reverend Patrick O’Connor, Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica was at the forefront of this effort along with hundreds of other clergy and thousands of residents. In light of this disappointing development, they are persisting in their advocacy to hold Mayor de Blasio to his promise.

Bill to Limit Air BNB

There is a bill before the legislature to limit Air BNB which can deplete available affordable housing stock while also introducing competition to hotels by enabling land owners to set up their own “illegal hotels”. In some upstate resort communities like Lake Placid, affordable housing stock for workers is depleted because of Air BNB. Click here for a good description of the arguments made by Hotel Trades Council and affordable housing advocates to limit Air BNB.

Click here and here for coverage of the effort underway in the state legislature to expand Air BNB which is opposed by Tenants PAC.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

After successful passage of a pre-trial criminal justice reforms including partial elimination of cash bail and discovery and speedy trial reforms, there are a series of other bills under consideration.

1. Parole Reform

On Tuesday, May 14th there will be a Parole Justice Advocacy Day which will seek passage of three initiatives:

- The Fair and Timely Parole Bill: Release people from prison when they become eligible for parole if they are no danger to public safety.

- The Elder Parole Bill: Give elders 55 and over who have served 15 or more years a chance to apply for parole and receive a hearing.
• Fully staff the currently understaffed parole board with commissioners who believe in rehabilitation and can make fair and impartial decisions.

Here are the materials you will need and watch this 45-minute training video before Tuesday. Both the materials and the video have some helpful tips about lobbying and important background information on parole. Later this week you’ll receive another email with your team assignments and the legislators you’ll be meeting with. If you are traveling from New York City, buses will leave at 6:00am SHARP from 4th Ave, between 13th and 14th Streets in Manhattan. Don't be late! There will also be a Long Island bus making two stops at 5:30am and 6:15am: 5:30 am: Sisters of St. Joseph’s, 1725 Brentwood Road, Building 2 Main, Brentwood, NY 11717 and 6:15 am: 500 Searingtown Rd., Roslyn, NY 11576.

Once in Albany, here is the schedule for the day:

10:00 a.m. Gather at the War Room (Wash. Ave. entrance, 1st left, elevators on right to 2nd floor) for chants, marches, and visits to legislators! To sign up for a legislative team visit, or just to let the organizers know you are coming, RSVP here.

2:00 p.m. (Note time change) Press conference and rally at the Million Dollar Staircase (Wash. Ave. entrance, 1st right to 2nd left, elevators on left to 3rd or 4th floor)

Please email Michelle George, Executive Director of the Parole Preparation Project at mlewin@paroleprepny.org or Dave George at dgeorge23@gmail.com if you have any questions about the day. For more background go to The Work of Parole Preparation Project and Parole Preparation Project Website.

2. HALT bill to limit solitary confinement to 15 days and use of alternatives for rehabilitation.

The HALT bill has enough co-sponsors in the Assembly and the Senate for passage. The challenge now is to encourage Senate Leader Stewart Cousins to allow the bill to be voted on by the full Senate. We have mixed reports about the Senate Leader’s willingness to do so. We urge you to call both Speaker Heastie and Senate Leader Stewart Cousins to bring the bill to the floor for a vote.

3. Less is More

The Less is More bill will limit the use of technical violations as a basis for a person’s parole being terminated and sent back to prison. There are a dozen or so co-sponsors in the Assembly and the Senate. More are needed. Click here to learn more about the Less is More Bill.

4. Cash Bail Funds

The pre-trial reforms partially eliminated the use of cash bail. Cash bail, however, remains a pretrial tool that can be used by judges for most felonies. This bill attempts to make it possible for groups outside of New York City to legally establish a cash bail fund to post bail for defendants. It appears the bill has good support and has been approved by key committees and is moving to the floor for a vote. So far, the following groups have signed a joint Memo of Support attached or do their own. So far, Brooklyn Defender Services, Katal Center for Health, Equity & Justice, Legal Aid Society of Nassau County, Madison County Bail Fund, New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, New York State Council of Churches, New York State Defenders Association, Tompkins County OAR Bail Fund, Tompkins County Assigned
Counsel Program are on the memo. If your organization would like to sign the below memo of support, contact Anne Rabe with the New York Defenders Association at ARabe@nysda.org.

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S. 494 (Rivera) & A. 6980 (Blake) Charitable Bail Fund Reform Act

We urge your support for the Charitable Bail Fund Reform Act S. 494 (Rivera) and A. 6980 (Blake). This long-overdue bill would remove unnecessary restrictions that are hampering Charitable Bail Organizations (CBOs) in New York State and enable them to provide effective assistance to many more poor people who cannot afford bail.

The bill removes the geographical restriction that an organization may only offer bail in one county outside of New York City so that efficient regional CBOs can be established and raises the monetary amount that CBOs may provide in bail from $2,000 to $10,000. The recent bail reform law, which goes into effect on January 1, 2020, ends cash bail for some, but not all, criminal charges. Cash bail is still in place for some crimes, so CBOs are still necessary. Under the bail reform law and this bill, the bail process would be governed by two gatekeepers. Judges would decide whether or not to approve bail for a defendant. When the court sets bail, the CBO will decide whether or not to provide bail to the applicant, after a careful evaluation and interview process based on strict criteria. The bail reform law largely retains judicial discretion to determine whether bail should be set, the defendant should be released, or the individual should be held in jail before trial. Judges will be allowed to consider, among other factors, the person’s record of criminal convictions, the current charges, the person’s history of flight, and the person’s “activities and history.”

Because of the existing statutory restrictions, outside of New York City which has 3 bail funds, only two counties are known to have a CBO. This dynamic is very unfair for people in 55 counties of the state, who deserve equal access to justice. To help financially-struggling people who are charged with a crime and presumed innocent, it is critical to pass this bill to enable CBOs to be created and expanded throughout the rest of the state. Every year hundreds of New Yorkers are incarcerated while awaiting trial, sometimes for very lengthy periods, simply because they can’t afford to post bail. Around the country, CBOs have demonstrated that very high percentages of people accused of a crime, after being bailed out by the CBO, return to court. The Madison County Bail Fund which operated for 32 years, covering both misdemeanors and felonies, had a 100% court appearance rate. Other bail funds in the State have court appearance rates in the high 90th percentile. Charitable bail organizations are regulated by the NYS Department of Financial Services. Bail is designed to ensure that the individual returns to court and, unless the person fails to appear in court, the bail is returned to the CBO at the conclusion of the case. CBOs have an incentive to support the person, and help assure his or her presence for every court appearance. By assisting with cash bail for New Yorkers who cannot afford it, CBOs help keep people out of jail, protect the presumption of innocence, and help keep families intact. A period of pretrial incarceration can have a devastating effect on a person’s life as families can be torn apart and jobs can be lost. This bill seeks to support the creation of regional CBOs to provide effective assistance to many more poor people who cannot afford bail.

Many justice and faith-based organizations strongly support passage of this bill. The NYS Association of Counties is issuing a separate Memo of Support.

For more information contact Lance Salisbury, Supervising Attorney, Tompkins County Assigned Counsel Program, and a Board member of the Tompkins County Bail Fund (funded by the County Legislature) at lsalisbury@tompkins-co.org
5. Marijuana Justice

Decriminalization and legalization of marijuana is a key tool in reducing incarceration rates and saving lives. Here is an article in the Gothamist which explains.

This a complex issue where advocates seek not to expand access to marijuana for youth but at the same time decriminalize and regulate its possession and sale. Far too many people have been incarcerated for possession of marijuana. Lack of legalization also encourages an underground market with the results being similar to the unintended criminal consequences of prohibition in 1920s. Faith leaders, we have discovered, are on many sides of this issue. We urge you to study this issue closely and consider it in your congregations as you deal with drug abuse and incarceration rates. If you wish to lend your support to marijuana legalization you can sign on to this faith leader letter prepared in conjunction with the Drug Policy Alliance by clicking here. We urge you to review the materials prepared by the Drug Policy Alliance by clicking here.

Here is an editorial in the Times Union on marijuana legalization by Peter Volkman who is the police chief in Chatham, New York. We invite you to also listen into a series on marijuana justice looking at different sides of the issue on the Brian Lehrer Show by clicking here for a series of shows he has done on the subject by clicking here

ELECTION REFORM

Fair Elections

The Assembly and Senate, as part of its budget package, approved the formation of commission to make recommendations on public financing including a 6-1 small donor match. We are now awaiting appointments to the Commission and have it seated so it has enough time to make its recommendations by December 2019.

Fair Elections of New York offers this update:

The Syracuse Post-Standard Editorial Board wrote recently about how New York’s big-money-dominated elections discourages everyday people from participating. This isn’t news to most people, but what’s important is their solution: small donor matching for elections. We have a critical opportunity right now to create a small donor matching system. We have to take action.

Elected officials in Albany didn't pass small donor matching program in this year’s state budget, but they committed to forming a commission that would outline New York's small donor matching program by December 1st. Now a month later, we’re still waiting for the commission to be set up!

Don’t let our leaders off the hook. Email your state legislators now to ask: Where’s the commission on public financing of elections? >>

Small donor public financing will empower all under-represented New Yorkers in the political process instead of letting big donors, who tend to be white, wealthy, male, and hold different priorities than the rest of us, set the agenda.

If the Legislature and the Governor are serious about creating fair elections in New York, they will act quickly to seat a strong, independent, pro-public financing commission.
With the clock ticking on the public financing commission, urge your state legislators to act. Email them now. >>

Following a surge of grassroots activism across the state campaign finance reform became a top budget issue. Now we have to keep up the pressure to make sure our leaders stick to their promises.

Together, we can ensure New York has fair elections that work for all of us, not just big donors. Thank you for helping keep up the pressure when it counts

Three Remaining Elections Reforms

The legislature passed a variety of overdue election reforms earlier in the 2019 session. For a description of those accomplishments click here for an explanation by Let New York Vote.

There are, however, three remaining reforms which need to be passed in this session:

1. Registration Closer to Primary Elections

The current deadline for New Yorkers to change party affiliation, or for unaffiliated voters to enroll in a party, is nearly a year before the primary — the most restrictive deadline in the country — locking out hundreds of thousands of voters during the primaries. Some of these voters want to change their party to have their voices heard in a primary, but the majority are not registered in any party and cannot partake in any primary in our closed primary state. The deadline to enroll in a party must be shortened to allow people to make an informed decision when they vote.

2. Parolee Voting

At present, if you are on parole, you have permission to vote by executive order with some caveats. We need to pass a bill which makes the right to vote for parolees to be made permanent.

3. Automatic Voter Registration

It should not be the case for people to have to opt in to vote. Instead, we should make voter registration automatic and, instead, only ask if people wish to opt out.

Click here for a more complete explanation of these election reform bills.

ENVIRONMENT

The Council support the passage of the Climate and Community Protection Act and is one of its first co-sponsors. Here is a political update from New York Renew:

CCPA Political Update

The climate crisis is at the top of the national conversation. A recent poll showed that 82% of Democratic voters rate “taking aggressive action to slow the effects of climate change” as very important -- the top issue among seven issues polled.
New York State has been considering climate action for several years. The Climate and Community Protection Act (CCPA, S2992/A3876) is the strongest proposal for getting NY State off of fossil fuels while investing in equity and justice. It also has the best chance of passing this year.

**The Climate and Community Protection Act has political backing and momentum**

- The State Senate held five hearings on the bill. The Assembly is holding a sixth on May 17.
- In the past month, the CCPA has been covered in the Washington Post, the Nation, City & State, Gotham Gazette, Albany Times Union, and WNYC, among others.
- The Senate Majority Leader and Assembly Speaker have reiterated their commitment to using the CCPA as a vehicle for climate legislation that will pass this year.
- The Governor’s secretary for Energy and the Environment, Dale Bryck, has said publicly that the CCPA is the vehicle for climate legislation this year.

There are still obstacles to passage. The Governor’s proposal of the Climate Leadership Act (CLA) and his public comments indicate that his office is pursuing a watered-down CCPA.

**The final version of the bill must include the following**

- A legally enforceable economy-wide target for greenhouse gas emission reductions. The Climate Leadership Act only sets a legally enforceable standard for emissions from electricity, which makes up less than 20% of NY State’s emissions. Transportation and buildings make up the bulk of NY State’s emissions (66%).

- 40% investment of state energy funds directed towards communities on the front lines of climate change and pollution. Polluting facilities and environmental hazards are more likely to be sited in communities of color and low-income communities, causing disproportionate exposure to pollution and related illnesses. These communities suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change, including flooding and severe heat. The CLA includes no targeted investment for frontline communities.

- Prevailing wage standards for green jobs receiving state support. Analysis shows that the CCPA would create 150,000 jobs over the first decade. Unlike the current state energy policy, fair labor standards and prevailing wages will be attached to all projects that flow from this legislation, ensuring middle-class wages for green economy workers. The CLA does not include wage standards for green jobs.

**Fossil Fuel Divestment**

There was a joint Assembly and Senate hearing on Fossil Fuel Divestment. Mark Dunlea recorded the session. Here are the links to listen in:

*On April 30, the NYS Legislature held a hearing on the legislation to divest NYS pension funds from fossil fuels. The NYS Legislature held a hearing on April 30 2019 on the bill by Sen. Krueger and As. Ortiz to divest the state pension fund from fossil fuels in five years. In part 1, .. We hear from Richard Schrader of NRDC; Sen. Krueger; and Anastasia Titarchuk of the NYS Comptroller Office. By Mark Dunlea for Hudson Mohawk Radio Network.*
In part 2, we hear from Rachel Rivera of NY Communities for Change; Rev. Ken Scott of GreenFaith; and Daniel Zarrilli, chief climate advisor for NYC Mayor's Office. By Mark Dunlea for Hudson Mohawk Radio Network.

We also continue to collect signatures for the Faith Leader Fossil Fuel Divestment letter: You can sign on by clicking here.

The Interfaith Climate Justice Community of Western New York is also conducting a sign on letter campaign for Divestment. They write:

Dear Interfaith Climate Justice Community of WNY/Faith Community Friends,

Below is a sign-on letter from members of the WNY Faith Community to NYS Comptroller, Thomas DiNapoli. Comptroller DiNapoli manages $180 million of public pension money. He has invested over $5 billion of those funds in oil, gas and coal companies—fossil fuels. We are respectfully requesting that the Comptroller divest the pension fund of its fossil fuel holdings. In signing this letter, we are making a moral statement that it is unacceptable to continue to invest in fossil fuel drilling and mining operations, especially when renewable energy (wind, solar, geothermal, hydro) sources are available providing shareholders with returns as high or higher than those of fossil fuel stocks. Over 1000 organizations (over 1/4th from the faith community) have divested their fossil fuel stocks to make a moral statement.

Some of you have already signed the letter (nearly 60 individuals to date). Please consider doing one more thing. Make a copy of this letter and ask others in your place of worship sign the letter (a sign on sheet is enclosed). Organizations can also sign (for example, your Social Justice Committee).

The goal is to collect hundreds of names and WNY faith affiliations and send them to Comptroller DiNapoli. Please mail the names and congregational affiliations to Riverside-Salem UCC/DC, P.O. Box 207, Grand Island, NY 14072-0207. We will add the names to the growing list. Mail your list by Monday, May 19th.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

Sister Eileen O’Connor (ICJC co-convenor)

Roger Cook (Riverside-Salem UCC/DC, ICJC co-convenor)

Sign on Letter from the Interfaith Climate Justice Community of Western New York in Favor of Divestment of Fossil Fuels from state Pension Fund
The Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli
Office of the New York State Comptroller
Albany, New York
Re: Fossil Fuels Divestment Act

Honorable Comptroller DiNapoli,

We, the faith-based community of Western New York, are asking for you to commit to the divestment of the NY state Common Retirement Fund (CRF) from fossil fuels similar to what would be called for in the Fossil Fuels Divestment Act. This would be a meaningful and critically important way for the state of New York and CRF to address global warming.

All of our faiths acknowledge the gift of creation. We have a responsibility to care for our common home and have been called to action to protect the earth by many, including Pope Francis the 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*’. We write to affirm the faith community’s grave concern over the threat climate change in general, and fossil fuel extraction and use in particular, pose to our common home and to the poor and vulnerable here and around the world.

As citizens of the state of New York, we strongly encourage you to commit the CRF to divesting from fossil fuels. We acknowledge and appreciate your concern to tackle climate crisis with shareholder engagement. It is a worthy commitment, but we must respectfully recognize that there is great urgency and moreover, this method is not proving effective to influence fossil fuel producers such as those listed in the CU200. Church leaders are well aware of the hypocrisy of the fossil fuel industry that continues to search for new fossil fuel reserves disregarding the Paris Agreement which they claim to support. That is why over 1,000 organizations have already divested from fossil fuel corporations, with more joining every month.

The magnitude of the climate crisis requires bold decisions. Through the introduction of the Fossil Fuels Divestment Act, New York is showing that there is strong interest in the state in divesting. Through your decision to divest, New York and the CRF could play an important role in altering the current fossil fuel business model, one that is in fundamental conflict with life on earth. We hope that through taking this step and demonstrating its role as a leader, New York might be recalled as one of the institutions that contributed to changing the course, for Creation and all who share it.

Yours faithfully,
Sister Eileen O’Connor, Co-Convenor, ICJC of WNY
Roger Cook, Riverside-Salem United Church of Christ/Disciples, Co-Convenor, ICJC of WNY

In faith,
Peter Cook
Executive Director
New York State Council of Churches