



Didi Barrett

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THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Energy

COMMITTEES
Agriculture
Environmental Conservation
Tourism, Parks, Arts and
Sports Development

January 9, 2026

Acting Chair Charles Bell
New York State Energy Research and Development Authority Board
17 Columbia Circle
Albany, NY 12203

Re: Public Comment on the Draft 2026 RGGI Operating Plan Amendment

Dear Acting Chair Bell,

As Chair of the New York State Assembly Committee on Energy, I write today to offer comments on the Draft 2026 Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) Operating Plan Amendment. As NYSERDA operates largely off-budget, and this RGGI funding impacts programs through March 2029, it is critical that we focus on programs with a proven record of success, and on initiatives that will help meet everyday New Yorkers where they are as we work to reach our climate goals.

It is good to see that NYSERDA has reversed course on cutting funding to the EmPower+ program and that the draft plan proposes a significant increase in funding for EmPower+ for the next three years (with a new total of \$240.9 million). This highly effective program has helped low and moderate-income New Yorkers make energy-efficient home improvements like installing heat pumps and insulation, saving them money while reducing their carbon footprint. I encourage additional funding to expand the eligibility for Empower+ to ensure those that live at the “tipping point” – just one healthcare crisis, car repair or appliance replacement away from financial hardship – are also able to access these resources. The New York State Legislature recognized the importance of creating financial incentives for these projects by allocating \$200 million in the 2023 budget to support this program and again in the 2025 budget with \$50 million in the Sustainable Future Fund.

While an increase in RGGI funding for NY-SUN totalling \$24 million over the next three years is helpful, I encourage the state to ensure NY-SUN is adequately funded to develop 20 GWs of distributed solar by 2035, as laid out in my legislation (A.8758). NY-SUN incentives have made solar energy more accessible to homes, businesses, and communities through the state and has played a major role in the state achieving its 6 GW of distributed solar goal ahead of schedule. The reallocation of NY-SUN money by the Public Service Commission (PSC) to other programs last year, combined with the elimination of federal tax credits starting later this year, will have a detrimental impact on the solar industry and the new jobs New York State has worked so hard to develop. The state should lean into our success and double down on what we are able to achieve in these uncertain times.

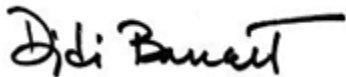
I am pleased to see an increase in Clean Energy Communities funding – for a total of \$31 million over the next three years. This initiative has greatly benefited municipalities and has helped develop climate smart leadership, build community-wide resiliency and increase economic opportunity. The Clean Energy Communities program has successfully provided the tools, resources, and technical assistance needed for local governments to reduce their energy usage and invest in clean energy solutions. This is a critical long-term investment.

A resilient energy grid is crucial to continued electricity reliability and the state must take a holistic – rather than piecemeal – look at improving our aging energy grid. We have introduced legislation calling for a Grid Modernization Commission (A.982) to plan for the additional demand and stress put on our energy infrastructure by electrification and the proliferation of data centers and other large energy users and I encourage you and your colleagues to look at this legislation and its approach as a potential use of RGGI funding.

As a final point, it's great to see the increase in Advanced Fuels Innovation funding (for a total of \$24.25 million over the next three years) to continue supporting research and technology studies and demonstration projects for advanced fuels. It is important to note that sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) is currently the only viable method to significantly reduce GHG emissions from the aviation sector. Equally important, it has the ability to dramatically improve the air quality of disadvantaged communities near airports virtually overnight. I encourage the state to continue to utilize RGGI money to incentivize the production and use of SAFs by establishing a SAF tax credit as laid out in A.7308-A.

Thank you for your consideration. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or my office with any questions.

Sincerely,



Didi Barrett
Member of Assembly, 106th District
Chair, Assembly Energy Committee

cc: Doreen Harris, President and CEO, NYSERDA
Hon. Carl Heastie, Speaker, NYS Assembly
Sean Ewart, Deputy Secretary for Energy & Environment, NYS Executive Chamber