



KARINES REYES
Assembly Member 87th District

CHAIR
Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force
Subcommittee on Workplace Safety

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January 9, 2026

NYSERDA
rggiprograms@nyserda.ny.gov

RE: Comments on the Draft 2026 RGGI Operating Plan Amendment in Support of Increased Funding Levels for the EmPower+ Program

Dear NYSERDA,

I write to **enthusiastically support** NYSERDA's proposed Draft 2026 RGGI Operating Plan Amendment that provides increased funding levels for the EmPower+ program.

I am the Chair of the New York State Assembly & Senate's Puerto Rican / Hispanic Task Force. The Task Force is a body composed of nearly 30 Assembly Members and State Senators of Latino-descent, along with state legislators that represent districts containing significant Latino populations. We stand united, as a committed voice, and use our collective power to initiate, amplify, and win comprehensive policy achievements that benefit Hispanic New Yorkers. We look to achieve innovative policy changes that can create a blueprint for other states and the federal government to consider and implement, for the benefit of our vital community.

NYS is undertaking the most ambitious effort in the nation to meet the challenge of climate change. NY's Climate Law recognizes that climate change doesn't affect all communities equally. It is a threat that exacerbates existing burdens, vulnerabilities, and stressors in certain communities statewide. For this reason, the climate law required the identification and consideration of disadvantaged communities (DACs) in implementing the climate act and other state-led actions. All state agencies are required to consider the impacts on DACs in their decision making.

New York uses RGGI proceeds to promote and implement programs for electrification, energy efficiency and renewable energy development in compliance with the Climate Law. RGGI programs contribute to economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions reductions and provide benefits to New York's historically overburdened and underserved communities. Proceeds from the RGGI CO₂ auction must support the statewide goal of the Climate Law that 40%, and not less than 35%, of overall benefits from the investment of RGGI proceeds will be spent in DACs.

The EmPower+ program helps low-to-moderate income (LMI) households to save energy and money toward energy improvements made to their primary residence. The program focuses on one-to-four family households. Through EmPower+, eligible New Yorkers can receive a no-cost home energy audit, a customized plan for electrification and energy efficiency measures and no cost direct install of improvements identified during the home energy audit. Empower+ participants can receive funding toward the cost of the energy efficiency and electrification improvements, including air sealing, insulation, heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, and electrical service and wiring upgrades.

The draft 2026 RGGI Operating Plan amendment proposes a significant increase in funding for the EmPower+ program for the next three years with a new total of 240.9M. The plan estimates that 90% of EmPower+ allocations will directly benefit LMI and disadvantaged communities.

I represent Assembly District 87 located in Bronx County, a district which has almost entirely been deemed a “Disadvantaged Community” by NYSERDA. 37.2% of Bronx County households have an area median income of 0-30% which is considered “Extremely Low-Income” and another 22% of residents have an AMI of 30-60% which is considered “Very low Income.” Residents of Bronx County can achieve annual average energy savings of \$684 when basic insulation and an air-source heat pump is installed in their home. For the nearly 40% of Bronx County households heating their homes with expensive heating oil the savings are even greater with an annual average savings of \$729.52. Clearly, this level of annual energy bill savings will mean a great deal to my LMI constituents.

As Chair of the Joint Legislative Puerto Rican & Hispanic Taskforce, I zealously support this proposed amendment to the RGGI spending plan which increases funding for the EmPower+ program. About half of New York households are low-to-moderate income households. Nearly 60 percent of LMI households live in one-to-four family homes, and over 40 percent of these households are renters. Reducing energy consumption through EmPower+’s electrification, energy efficiency and weatherization measures will bring down energy costs for these LMI households during times of high inflation.

Not only does the EmPower+ program help the participants of the program, it is important to note that many of the high-paying electrification contractor jobs created through State electrification incentive programs, like the EmPower+ program, are hired from DACs.

In conclusion, I fully support the new funding levels proposed for the EmPower+ program in the Draft 2026 RGGI Operating Plan Amendment and respectfully recommend that the NYSERDA Board of Directors approve those funding levels at the Board meeting on January 26, 2026.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karines Reyes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karines Reyes, R.N.
Member of Assembly – District 87
Chair – NYS Assembly & Senate’s Puerto Rican / Hispanic Task Force