



*****PRESS RELEASE*****

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On 1-Year Anniversary of Orange, Smoky Skies in NYC, Climate & Labor Coalition Calls for Climate Justice in Public Schools

New York, NY – Today, labor unions, environmental justice groups, elected officials, parents, and students from the [Climate Works for All](#) coalition commemorated the one-year anniversary of orange, smoky skies in NYC with a rally in City Hall Park, calling for climate justice in public schools. Among the speakers were Councilmembers Tiffany Caban, Shahana Hanif, Carmen De La Rosa, Sandy Nurse, and climate and labor advocacy groups.

Livestream / Video Recording [here](#). Photos [here](#).

On June 6, 2023, toxic, ashy air from Canadian wildfires turned the sky orange as New Yorkers experienced the worst air quality in the world. Schools were forced to go remote, and three months later, the city weathered record flooding that [affected schools citywide](#). One year later, we're heading into a [far-above-average storm season](#), and [Canadian wildfire smoke is once again drifting into the US](#).

Public schools should be bastions of safety for students, teachers, and school workers. But instead, school buildings are crumbling and running on fossil fuels, worsening climate impacts, and failing to be safe, healthy learning and work environments, as poor air quality and extreme temperatures also [impact performance](#). And as emergencies become more and more frequent and visible, [climate anxiety has also become a major issue among the youngest generations](#), affecting mental health and learning. As the crisis intensifies, the City must lead the way toward our clean energy future.

Climate Works for All's solution is Green, Healthy Schools that are powered by clean energy, have high quality ventilation for students and staff to breathe clean air, create

green jobs, and save the city money on energy and disaster repairs. The coalition is calling for \$600M in the FY2025 budget to electrify and upgrade NYC public schools — a downpayment on the funding needed to decarbonize 500 schools by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions as a school district by 2040, thereby helping the City meet Local Law 97 decarbonization mandates.

“Last year's orange, smoky skies were an urgent call to climate action. The extractive economy and its pursuit of fossil fuel profits is putting Black and Brown communities at the center of deadly heat waves, hurricanes, and flooding. We see the worst of this crisis in our schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Investing \$600 million for Green Healthy Schools in this year's budget is a critical step toward a cleaner and safer New York City,” **said Faiza Azam, Labor and Climate Organizer of ALIGN and coordinator of the Climate Works for All coalition.**

“We can't address climate change and its impacts without an intersectional and worker-focused response. That's why I'm enthusiastic about the initiative that the Climate Works for All coalition has brought together, collaborating with Council Members, unions, and grassroots organizations,” **said Council Member Shahana Hanif.** “Their collective vision aims to tackle the climate crisis with a transformative approach, coupling equitable infrastructure upgrades with well-paying union jobs. This mission extends beyond policy, aiming for environmental justice that uplifts those most affected by the climate crisis.”

“Smoky skies and big storms affect my two children's mental health. They, like all New York City children, deserve to see their city stand up to protect them and protect their future by making their public schools as safe, green, and healthy as possible,” **said Anya Kamenetz, a mother and organizer with Climate Families NYC.**

“Green, Healthy, Schools is urgent to us because these are the buildings we spend our lives in and it's clear that they're totally unprepared to deal with the conditions that they will face. As the people living through the consequences of underfunding, there's no other option,” **said Iz Greenawalt, Manhattan Borough Organizer at TREEage.**

Last month, [the coalition released a letter](#) signed by more than 40 organizations and 13 City Council members in support of the following FY2025 budget priorities:

- **Invest in Green, Healthy Schools** Dedicate \$600M in the FY2025 budget to electrify and upgrade NYC Public Schools — the most impactful target on the city's path to decarbonization — and put the school district on a path to reach net zero emissions by 2040.

- **Fund Local Law 97 Implementation** We are encouraged to see the administration allocate funding to the Department of Buildings for an increase in staff who would work specifically on the implementation of Local Law 97 of 2019 (LL97). To supplement this and ensure that all building owners get sufficient information and are able to access much needed funding to comply with the law, CW4A is calling on the City to pursue state and federal funding opportunities to support building upgrades and retrofits, increase staffing at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and redirecting \$5M of the funding from the NYC Accelerator to local community-based organizations and nonprofits that can provide education, outreach, and technical assistance services on LL97 compliance.

Background:

Buildings in NYC contribute to nearly two-thirds of citywide Greenhouse Gas emissions. The single most effective way to significantly reduce these emissions is to decarbonize and retrofit our building stock; i.e. implement Local Law 97 of 2019. As we enter the first compliance period of LL97 this year, there is a clear need for additional technical support, and more importantly, additional funding streams to ensure that building owners are able to undertake retrofits. But private buildings are not the only ones that have a responsibility to reduce emissions, the City also needs to ensure that public buildings comply with LL97 mandates.

NYC public schools' aging infrastructure runs on fossil fuels and contributes to poor air quality, which not only impacts student and staff health but can also undermine learning by negatively affecting student attendance, comfort, and performance. Additionally, schools are vulnerable to ever-worsening climate disasters, felt first and worst by Black and brown students in Environmental Justice communities. While the City has [already identified](#) school buildings as a great place to start to meet NYC's climate goals, Mayor Adams' Leading the Charge initiative has to date only allocated funding to electrify 33 schools out of a promised 100 schools by 2030. But with 1400 school buildings in NYC, we need to work faster — Climate Works for All is advocating to electrify and upgrade 500 schools by 2030 and make NYC's school district zero-emissions by 2040. Investing in Green, Healthy Schools will save the city millions on utilities; create green, union jobs and improve working conditions for school workers, and help meet the mandates of Local Law 97, where the City should lead the way.

Climate Works for All is calling for greater transparency, urgent funding, and climate action in order to achieve a just transition to a decarbonized and renewable energy economy.

[Climate Works for All](#) is a citywide coalition of labor, community, faith, environmental justice, and climate organizations, co-coordinated by ALIGN and NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, that have come together to fight climate change and inequality in NYC by demanding a Just Transition for workers and environmental justice communities. CW4A campaigns aim to move us towards an equitable economy, a resilient, livable and healthy climate, and prioritize justice for low income Black and Brown communities across New York City.

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