**UU Faith Action Environmental Justice Task Force**

**Annual Report – June, 2021**

The Environmental Justice Task Force advocates for the right of ALL people to have access to clean air, clean water and a clean environment.

We were very active this past year, despite the COVID which restricted in-person attendance at State House hearings and participation in rallies. Instead, we participated in numerous virtual meetings, webinars and hearings to get our message across.

With an eye toward improving public health and improving historic inequities, the Environmental Justice Task Force focused this past year on three major issues:

* mandatory emissions reductions in Environmental Justice communities including transitioning to electric vehicles, especially buses and trucks.
* mitigating lead in the New Jersey water supply and
* building support for a Green Amendment to the New Jersey Constitution

This past year we continued to build partnerships with both Environmental Justice organizations and other environmental groups working on clean energy programs. Kim Gaddy of Clean Water Action and Maria Lopez Nunez from the Ironbound Community Corporation spoke at our monthly meetings to bring us up to speed on realities of the excessive pollution in their neighborhoods. David Pringle, legislative consultant to a number of NJ environmental organizations gave us a tutorial on the legislative process and effective strategies for impacting legislation. We’re pleased to announce that Environmental Justice leaders Dr. Ana Baptista and Dr. Nicky Sheets who were keynote speakers at UU Faith Action’s Annual Meeting last year were both appointed to the newly formed White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council. And our own Nancy Griffeth was appointed to the NJ DEP Environmental Justice Advisory Board giving us a direct line of communication to that board*.*

A major success of the past year was passing the Environmental Justice Bill and having it signed into law. This new law, 10 years in the making and a major achievement of the EJ community will significantly reduce emissions in overburdened communities But the job isn’t complete yet. We are now participating in DEP Rulemaking meetings to ensure that the law is implemented properly. As we speak, there are several proposals to site polluting facilities in Newark in an effort to get in under the wire before the law takes effect.

Plans for several fossil fuel pipelines were stopped and the fossil fuel fed NJ Transit Powerplant was put on hold while a feasible solar alternative is investigated. Unfortunately, this is a never ending battle. As the regulatory process grinds on, several of those projects are now back being reconsidered, and the Southern Reliability Link pipeline in South Jersey won their case to proceed in court.

We provided input on bills that promote Community Solar to Low/Middle income families and the Clean Energy Equity Act. We participated in the NJ Protect Against Climate Threats (NJPACT) Initiative and the Energy Efficiency Coalition, and provided comments for the Wind Strategy Plan.

We’ve followed several bills on lead in drinking water. One that requires public water systems to provide notice of elevated lead levels in drinking water to customers and local officials and require landlords to notify tenants of elevated lead was recently passed and signed by the Governor! Another requiring public water systems to inventory and replace lead service lines within 20 years is still pending.

We continue to advocate and educate about the NJ Green Amendment. Several congregations have hosted Maya von Rossum, leader of the Green Amendment movement, to explain the importance of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right of all residents to clean air, clean water and a clean environment. If enough legislators (in both houses) sponsor the bill, the Green Amendment will be on the November ballot for voters to decide on whether or not to adopt it.

Recognizing that funding is a key component to most of our favorite bills, we provided input to the State Budget process. Specifically, we opposed spending billions of dollars on an expansion of the New Jersey Turnpike, suggesting that instead that money be spent on expanding and electrifying NJ Transit. We also spoke in favor of the Clean Energy Fund spending only for its intended purpose – to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

We continue to produce a fabulous monthly newsletter that highlights events, educational opportunities, hearings and news articles about many New Jersey environmental issues. The newsletter is available for anyone to read on our EJTF webpage, uufaithaction.org/blog/