



# Memorandum of Support Renewable Capitol Act

**S4842 (Fahy) / A3466 (Romero)**

AN ACT to amend the executive law and the public authorities law, in relation to the utilization of renewable energy at state-owned facilities in Albany

**SUMMARY:** The Renewable Capitol Act will require the New York State Capitol, Empire State Plaza (Plaza) and other state-owned buildings in downtown Albany to convert to 100% clean renewable energy within three years. The work will be designed through a planning process that includes public hearings and the input of environmental justice organizations.

**JUSTIFICATION:** New York’s landmark Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), passed in 2019, requires New York to cut greenhouse gas emissions 40% by 2030, in just five years. However, the buildings that the Governor and Legislature meet in every day continue to be powered by burning fracked gas in a low-income, people of color neighborhood located blocks from the Capitol building. The governor’s proposal to cut emissions at the Plaza by 50% in ten years doesn’t meet New York’s own emission reductions requirements.

The Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant, which heats and cools the Capitol and ESP, has polluted Albany's low-income Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill neighborhoods for more than a century, first burning coal, then oil, then garbage, and now fracked gas. Residents of Sheridan Hollow and nearby Arbor Hill have high rates of asthma, cancer, and other health problems. **Continued operation of the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant is inconsistent with the Department of Environmental Conservation's Environmental Justice Policy 29**, which prohibits any racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group from bearing a disproportionate share of the environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations.

**Work to transition the complex has begun but there is no timeline to transition to renewable heat.**

In 2017, the Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy called for the Capitol and Plaza to transition to renewable energy. In 2019, the Legislature rejected a \$88 million appropriation to add two new fracked gas turbines on Sheridan Avenue due to opposition by community groups. The funds for that project were redirected towards energy efficiency and renewable energy projects for the Capitol and Plaza. Last Fall, NYSERDA approved \$100 million to transition the remaining chillers to electricity. However, there are still six gas boilers at the site that continue to emit pollution and climate warming greenhouse gases into the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood.

The long awaited "Energy Master Plan" (commissioned in 2020) for the Plaza was released last July with a plan for a 50% reduction in emissions over ten years. The plan also calls for a Thermal Energy Network (TEN) for the Plaza at a cost of \$150 million, which will likely include geothermal energy, but there is no timeline to begin the work. How long must the residents of Sheridan Hollow wait? How long will New York take to meet it's own emission reduction mandates?

**Renewable options are available now.** Oklahoma, Michigan and Colorado all heat and cool their state capitol buildings with geothermal energy. Most recently, Michigan completed the transition in just 18 months and is already realizing a 25% reduction in annual utility costs. Making our State Capitol and other state facilities in downtown Albany run on renewables will give state agencies experience in designing renewable heating and cooling for large buildings, provide good jobs and necessary training for workers in renewable energy, help New York comply with our state climate goals, and serve as a model for the nation.

**For more information: [SHAREAlbany.org](http://SHAREAlbany.org) or [rmfosterny@gmail.com](mailto:rmfosterny@gmail.com)**