

November 22, 2022

The Honorable Paul Renner and The Honorable Kathleen Passidomo
The Florida Legislature
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

RE: Recommendation from community groups on the creation of a specialized legislative committee to address the climate crisis

Dear House Speaker-Designate Renner and Senate President-Designate Passidomo:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and our members, we urge you to create a Joint Select Committee on the Climate Crisis for the 2023-2024 Legislative Sessions.

Scientists and academics frequently cite Florida as one of the most vulnerable places on the planet to the impacts of climate change in the United States. This frequency is partly due to the threat that sea level rise poses to our more than 1,000 miles of coastline.¹ However, climate change's threat to Floridians extends far beyond coastal flooding alone. The impacts of climate change include:

- increasingly intense drought and flood conditions² (which will harm water quality and agricultural output);
- declining water quality through saltwater intrusion³ and failing septic systems⁴, increasingly destructive storms;
- heat waves that can affect the health of senior citizens and workers in outdoor industries;
- irreversible bleaching of our coral reefs; and
- increased risk of vector-borne diseases;
- massive declines in coastal property values;
- poor air quality, and far more.

Altogether, climate change is the biggest threat facing Floridians.

¹ Union of Concerned Scientists, Florida: Ground Zero in the Climate Crisis, May 2019

² Gray, Ellen. Merzdorf, Jessica. Earth's Freshwater Future: Extremes of Flood and Drought. NASA. June 13, 2019. <https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2881/earths-freshwater-future-extremes-of-flood-and-drought/>

³ Sherif, Mohsen & Singh, Vijay. (1999). Effect of climate change on sea water intrusion in coastal aquifers. *Hydrological Processes*. 13. 1277 - 1287.

10.1002/(SICI)1099-1085(19990615)13:8<1277::AID-HYP765>3.0.CO;2-W.

⁴Miami Dade County DERM, Septic Systems Vulnerable to Sea Level Rise, November 2018. <https://www.miamidade.gov/green/library/vulnerability-septic-systems-sea-level-rise.pdf>

The Florida peninsula has already warmed by one degree Fahrenheit over the past century.⁵ The warmer ocean waters are creating more significant storms and hurricanes that, when they make landfall, have the increased potential to cause massive losses of property and lives.

According to the US Geological Survey, a "100-year flood" is a magnitude that "statistically has a 1-percent chance of occurring in any given year. Likewise, the term "100-year storm" defines a rainfall event that statistically has this same 1-percent chance of occurring. Unfortunately, due to the harmful effects of climate change, these events are no longer sporadic; they have become more frequent and will intensify as time goes by. A prime example of the "100-year flood" and "100-year storm" is Hurricane Ian.

As you are keenly aware, in September 2022, Hurricane Ian landed in southwest Florida, causing extreme damage to properties and forcing Floridians out of their homes to seek shelter. Climate change intensified this weather event at a more rapid pace, and this is only the beginning. It is time to act to save the lives and property of millions of Floridians and our environment.

Climate change's significant social and economic impacts exacerbate existing challenges faced by Black, Latino, low-wealth, and fence-line communities⁶ of color across the state. It also affects our farmers, who face economic losses daily due to this crisis.

When Florida's numerous coastal homeowners move to higher ground to keep safe, many of Florida's historic communities of color are pushed out. This phenomenon is known as climate gentrification, and it is happening now.⁷ Inland and upland neighborhoods attract upscale development and wealthy investors, who, in turn, raise rents and force community members to leave, destroying critical social bonds and community-based wealth.⁸

Climate change poses a grave threat to our way of life and our economy, and for many people and Florida's wildlife, it is a threat to life itself. Local communities are making incredible efforts to combat the threat. **Now, state leaders must also explore and enact policies to address**

⁵ US Environmental Protection Agency, What Climate Change Means for Florida, August 2016, EPA 430-F-16-011

⁶ The State of Virginia defines in the Virginia Environmental Justice Act (Code of Virginia, Title 2.2 §234) the term fence-line community as "an area that contains all or part of a low-income community or community of color that presents an increased health risk to its residents due to the proximity to a major source of pollution".

⁷ Harris, A. (2021, June 23). Another study finds climate gentrification in Miami, this time in the rental market. Miami Herald. Retrieved November 2, 2022, from <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/environment/article252277363.html>

⁸ Gaudiello, C., Palomino, S., Parrilla, E., & Vidal, A. (2022, June 6). Little Haiti residents worry development leading to displacement, climate gentrification. Miami Herald. Retrieved November 2, 2022, from <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/environment/article261747122.html>

climate change's most harmful effects and root causes. It is up to leaders like you to ensure that our state explores not only adaptation to the changing conditions but also the systematic and rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, including nature-based carbon sequestration efforts. Over the next two years, Florida can chart an attainable and measurable plan of action to protect all our communities if you provide a forum for exchanging scientific, policy, and programmatic ideas at the highest level of state government.

According to the latest scientific reports, our window of opportunity to address climate change and mitigate its effects is short and closing rapidly before the damages become irreversible. In April 2022, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its 6th report,⁹ which expresses the dire need for governments at all levels to address climate change.

In addition, in 2018, thirteen federal scientific agencies, including NASA, NOAA, and the Department of Defense, released the 4th National Climate Assessment, which documents the profound damages climate change has already wrought throughout the country.¹⁰ Of particular importance to Florida:

- Extreme hot weather is becoming more common;
- Climate-related changes are beginning to compromise drinking water and wastewater treatment infrastructure severely; and
- Rising sea levels trigger migrations from our coastal communities.

Under your leadership, the Florida Legislature has the potential to be a positive force and a national leader for improving people's lives by transitioning Florida to a clean energy future and addressing climate change. Therefore, we request that you consider creating a Joint Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. This new committee should:

- Explore and propose policies for completely reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and opening our electricity markets to advance a steady transition to solar and other clean, renewable energy options and create a modern, efficient, and sustainable transportation infrastructure;
- Help Floridians lower their monthly electricity bill by finding ways to increase distributed solar and battery backup storage;

⁹ Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, View the full report at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>

¹⁰ USGCRP, 2018: *Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II* [Reidmiller, D.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, K.L.M. Lewis, T.K. Maycock, and B.C. Stewart (eds.)]. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. doi: 10.7930/NCA4.2018. View the full report at <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/> (last viewed Nov. 26, 2018).

- Increase energy efficiency for homes, businesses, schools, and government facilities;
- Complement federal climate efforts, including relevant programs and funding related to the landmark Inflation Reduction Act;
- Foster the growing green technology industry with job training programs or other incentives;
- Protect and enhance the long-term sustainability of our natural carbon sinks (like mangrove forests, wetlands, and grasslands) that will help communities endure the effects of climate change;
- Explore the intersections of public health, labor, racism, housing, and climate change; and
- Address resiliency plans, emergency management, building codes, property/rental insurance, and the economy as affected by climate change.

The Florida Legislature must address these issues thoughtfully, transparently, and holistically, beginning with the 2023 legislative session. The federal government has provided states with an incredible opportunity to access resources and expertise to address the climate crisis. Climate action at the state level cannot wait.

Climate change is a broad-ranging challenge that touches every element of our social and economic landscape. *However, in Florida, our environment is our economy.* Pristine beaches, ample outdoor recreation opportunities, vibrant wildlife and wetlands, robust agricultural output, and healthy forests are our state's brand and are crucial to our quality of life.

In April 2022, 30 state legislators urged Governor Ron DeSantis to declare a climate state of emergency¹¹ to hasten and advance the executive response to this crisis. We intend for the proposed Joint Select Committee on the Climate Crisis to complement and enhance the federal executive branch's state of emergency efforts.

The Florida Constitution states that "adequate provisions shall be made by law for the abatement of air and water pollution...and for the conservation and protection of natural resources." The Florida Legislature must conserve and protect our natural resources and scenic beauty. We believe that the climate change crisis facing Florida warrants, at a minimum, a serious and deliberative body to explore and propose policy solutions to address the worst effects of this unfolding disaster and enact policies that will solve the problem at its source.

¹¹ Eskamani, A. [@AnnaForFlorida]. (2022, April 21, 2022). *There is a lot going on in FL & none of it involves tackling the climate crisis. That's why as we approach #EarthDay myself & 29 lawmakers have sent a letter to Governor DeSantis asking him to declare a State of Climate Emergency so we can build collective security & prosperity.* [Image attached.] [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/annaforflorida/status/1517141274091945984>

Focusing on select impacts alone is not enough. A formal committee also affords Floridians a regular opportunity to engage with their lawmakers on this critical issue. Public input from residents and community leaders will lead to better policy and funding decisions.

You have the power to set Florida on a new course to ensure that all Floridians have a bright future here in the Sunshine State. Please use that power to establish a Joint Select Committee on the Climate Crisis for the upcoming 2023-2024 legislative sessions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sandra Adams
350 Pensacola

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League of United Latin American Citizens

Maayan Cohen
Action for the Climate Emergency (ACE)

Soraya Márquez
Mi Familia Vota

Mary Gutierrez
Earth Ethics, Inc.

Jeanette Ruiz
Miami Climate Alliance

Bradley Marshall
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Yaritza Perez
Moms Clean Air Force Florida Chapter

Aliki Moncrief
Florida Conservation Voters

Isabella Jaramillo
Rachel Carson Council

Letitia Harmon
Florida Rising

Lachanthia Hall
Rethink Energy Florida

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