

Philadelphia Climate Works Statement to City Council Hearing on the Environment
March 22, 2017 – City Hall Room 400
Speaker: Frank Ortiz, Temple University College of Engineering

“We are creating the world agenda for our time, and together we are going to challenge this nation to be bigger than politics, bigger than the election, and build a future we will call our own.”

Councilwoman Helen Gym, those were your words two months ago. And they're relevant to today's conversation about climate change and Philadelphia's future.

Climate change is not just about staunching greenhouse gas emissions but also about determining the price for our health and safety; the price for new technologies like tankless water heaters and home-based battery storage; the price for educating people to both understand as well as grow a fundamentally new economy; and the price for new, higher quality jobs with fair wages, rights and security.

Building strong communal equity into these strategies is essential, where any solution to curb or adapt to climate problems must serve highly impacted populations like low-income Philadelphians and working families.

A growing percentage of low-income households are located in flood-prone areas, heat islands, places with aging infrastructure, vacant lots and flimsy evacuation routes. Weatherproofing homes, investing in solar to save money long-term --- for some, these options aren't realistic. Low-income households in Philadelphia have the 8th highest utility bill burden in the country, with energy shutoff a top cause for Philadelphia homelessness.

Working families are also especially at risk because they often depend on dangerous jobs, vulnerable to climate change. People who work outside, fix our power lines, build our homes, drive our buses, measure our blood pressure, and interact with thousands of people a day from behind a counter --- their livelihoods place them face to face with rising temperatures, storms, flooding, and proliferation of contagious disease.

So we agree with the councilwoman and are creating an agenda for our time because ultimately, how we design our response will determine who gains, and who loses. That's why our climate programs *must* invest in the people, occupations, and communities bearing the greatest burdens of an unchecked climate crisis.

The aim of our coalition, Philadelphia Climate Works, is to work with you to identify these burdens and to craft proactive solutions, with over 20 different labor and community groups --- from teachers to builders, from Eastwick Friends & Neighbors Coalition to New Kensington CDC --- participating in our meetings to discuss the challenges we face and the interests we share in confronting climate change. And we look forward to collaborating with you going forward.

Thank you for holding this hearing and inviting us to speak.