



2023–2024 Legislative Priorities

The Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter will be prioritizing the following legislation during the 193rd legislative session. With the new state administrative leadership and the federal government's support, there is no better time to hasten our transition to renewable energy while strengthening our economy and communities. Each of these bills represents a step towards creating a cleaner, healthier, more equitable future for Massachusetts residents. If enacted, the legislation listed below will dramatically reduce carbon pollution and protect ratepayers, establish stronger environmental protections for historically marginalized communities, reduce fossil fuel reliance in the transportation and building sectors, restrict the use of PFAS and other harmful chemicals, and expand and protect our public lands.

Transportation

[S.2217](#) / [H.3392](#) An Act Setting Deadlines to Electrify the Commuter Rail (Sen. Crighton | Reps. Owens, Armini)

The MBTA commuter rail system is powered by polluting diesel locomotives. Electrifying the commuter rail will reduce harmful air pollution in neighborhoods along the routes and allow the MBTA to run faster and more reliable trains. This bill sets phased electrification targets for the different commuter rail lines and requires the MBTA to operate an all-electric commuter rail system by 2035. It prioritizes electrification of commuter rail lines passing through environmental justice corridors and directs the MBTA to implement line-specific service frequency standards.

[S.2218](#) / [H.3139](#) An Act setting deadlines for school bus and public fleet electrification, and programs to encourage electrification of private fleets (Sen. Crighton | Reps. Barber, Meschino)

The transportation sector is the largest contributor to climate pollution, which greatly impacts public health and air quality. Vehicle electrification is a vital strategy to transition to a clean transportation future. This bill requires all publicly-owned and leased vehicle and school bus fleets to be electric by 2035 and prioritizes electrification in locations serving environmental justice populations. It also creates a program to incentivize the transition of private fleets to electric vehicles.

[S.2285](#) / [H.3366](#) An Act electrifying regional transit authorities (Sen. Oliveira | Rep. LeBoeuf)

Regional transit authorities are a lifeline to over 250 communities beyond the reach of the MBTA. This bill set interim targets for all new vehicle purchases at RTAs to be electric, reaching 100% in 2035. It also creates a central planning office at MassDOT to provide

technical, funding, and procurement support to RTAs during this transition, including developing a bus electrification plan for each RTA.

[S.2277](#) / [H.3272](#) An Act to increase regional transit accessibility in the Commonwealth (Sen. Moran | Rep. Blais)

The goal of the RTA Advancement bill is to pave the way towards improved and expanded RTA service to better meet the needs of communities. The bill would increase the funding floor for RTAs to support the move towards 7-day-a-week service during critical commute hours, create a dedicated fund for RTAs, uplift community needs through an annual RTA Council report, and eliminate profitability as a performance metric for transit agencies.

Clean Energy

[S.2150](#) / [H.3225](#) An Act to Encourage Solar Development on Built and Disturbed Land (Sen. Mark | Reps. Garballey, Sabadosa)

Massachusetts must build significant solar energy generation to meet its climate laws. And we must also avoid damaging irreplaceable forests, watersheds, and natural lands whenever possible. *Every megawatt of solar on buildings or disturbed land is one less megawatt that replaces a habitat.* We should prioritize installing solar panels on buildings and disturbed sites such as parking lot canopies, brownfields and roadway cuts. This Act creates the needed incentives via market drivers to build such projects and removes existing caps and limits so that such projects continue to be built year after year.

[S.2135](#) / [H.3237](#) An Act establishing a moratorium on new gas system expansion (Sen. Gomez | Reps. Ramos, Williams)

The Springfield Climate Justice Coalition also endorses this legislation. Despite our urgent need to address the climate crisis and decrease our fossil fuel use, gas utilities continue to expand the fracked gas system into new areas of Massachusetts. This bill would put a moratorium on the biggest gas infrastructure until 2026, at the earliest, and will prevent gas utilities from expanding gas pipelines into new towns.

[S.2138](#) / [H.3169](#) An Act Protecting Ratepayers From Gas Pipeline Expansion Costs (Sen. Jehlen | Rep. Gordon)

Utilities continue to ask ratepayers to fund their new fossil fuel infrastructure. This bill would prevent ratepayer money from going toward new, large pipelines, which require the expansion of interstate infrastructure.

[S.481](#) / [H.872](#) An Act establishing a climate change superfund and promoting polluter responsibility (Sen. Eldridge | Rep. Owens)

This legislation creates a cost recovery program for climate change adaptation that obtains payments from the biggest greenhouse gas polluters, as determined by a formula, to be used toward funding climate change adaptive infrastructure projects in Massachusetts. A new adaptation master plan will direct how these funds are disbursed,

with no less than 35% going toward projects in environmental justice communities. The fund will also be required to go towards projects with high labor and materials standards for large projects.

Environmental Justice

[S.2113](#) / [H.3187](#) An Act Relative to Energy Facilities Siting Reform to Address Environmental Justice, Climate, and Public Health (Sen. DiDomenico | Rep. Madaro)

The Energy Utilities Siting Board has traditionally inadequately considered its siting decisions' environmental and community impacts. This legislation adds environmental justice, public health, and climate to the Energy Facilities Siting Board's responsibilities. It requires community engagement before filing for environmental or siting board review of a petition to construct a generating facility or an oil, gas, or substation facility. It also requires a cumulative impact assessment and an environmental justice (EJ) impact statement before approving any electricity generating facility, oil, gas, or substation facility. Finally, it prohibits the approval of electricity-generating facilities or substations if the EJ impact statement shows that they will result in public health or other harm to EJ populations.

[S.1382](#) / [H.2131](#) Act to improve outdoor and indoor air quality for communities burdened by pollution (Sen. Jehlen | Reps. Barber, Connolly)

Massachusetts has the sixth worst rate of asthma in the country. This legislation expands outdoor air monitoring for black carbon, ultrafine particulate matter, and criteria pollutants in pollution hotspots, in addition to setting ambitious air quality targets by 2030 and 2035. It requires the installation of air filters in existing eligible buildings and advanced filtration systems for new eligible buildings, such as daycare facilities, residential developments, hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities, school-aged childcare programs, temporary shelters, and nursing homes. It updates the state sanitary code to improve mold enforcement. Finally, it upgrades building codes to prevent the installation of new gas stoves.

[S.953](#) / [H.1677](#) An Act to create access to justice (Sen. DiDomenico | Meschino)

This legislation restores civil rights protections, makes legal remedies accessible, and protects vulnerable groups. Specifically, it would eliminate the burden of proving that government programs or activities with a disparate impact were motivated by discriminatory intent. It also allows victims to file claims in state court rather than federal court, removing administrative red tape before being able to bring a claim. Lastly, the bill prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, citizenship or immigration status, limited English proficiency, genetic information, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, medical condition, familial status, pregnancy, veteran status, receipt of public assistance, or any other protected characteristic.

[S.2246](#) / [H.3266](#) An Act Relative to Fare Free Buses (Sen. Jehlen | Rep. Barber, LeBoeuf)

This bill would establish one-year, fare-free pilots on the MBTA and RTAs. The MBTA pilot would be implemented on at least 20 routes, and the RTA pilot would be implemented on at least one route per RTA. The bill would also create an advisory group of community stakeholders for each pilot to analyze and improve the pilot.

Building Electrification

[S.2365](#) / [H.3232](#) An Act establishing a zero carbon renovation fund (Sen. Gomez | Rep. Vargas)

Buildings account for up to 40% of our state's emissions. This legislation would allocate \$300 million for zero-carbon renovations in existing buildings like affordable housing and public schools, and in environmental justice communities. By prioritizing the most vulnerable populations among us, this legislation would take critical steps to equitably reduce emissions, improve climate resiliency, lower energy costs, and improve overall health for communities most in need.

Toxics

[S.175](#) / [H.318](#) An Act Relative To Toxic Free Kids (Sen. Dubois | Rep. Hawkins)

This bill requires businesses that manufacture, sell, or distribute children's products in Massachusetts to report on toxic chemicals in those products. This bill would also prohibit the use of highly hazardous chemicals in children's toys, clothing, furniture, equipment, and other items.

[S.487](#) / [H.825](#) An Act Relative to Pesticides (Sen. Feeney | Rep. Hawkins)

This combined bill, approved by both chambers last year, would create an online portal and database for pesticide use reporting records with clear, online public access to the annual data and require that natural pesticides be used on children's playgrounds and fields.

[S.1356](#) / [H.2197](#) An Act to protect Massachusetts public health from PFAS (Sen. Cyr | Rep. Hogan)

Polyfluoroalkyls (PFAS), also known as "forever" chemicals because of their inability to break down, have been decisively linked to fertility declines, weakened immune systems, developmental interference, cancer, hormone disruption, and other health effects. State testing has revealed they are increasingly accumulating in Massachusetts water, soil, and homes. This bill results from the successful PFAS Task Force last session and will broadly address PFAS exposure. The bill calls for education, remediation, and regulation around PFAS. PFAS would be banned from all consumer products by 2030 and sooner for selected product categories, including food packaging, cookware, furnishings, children's products, and firefighters' personal protective equipment. The bill would also strengthen protections for our groundwater, surface water, drinking water, and private wells.

The Sierra Club supports getting to zero waste. Reaching this goal will require eliminating toxic, permanent plastic pollution based on fossil fuels. The Sierra Club supports strong, comprehensive plastic reduction efforts. The following bills address specific, high-impact categories of plastic products:

[S.570](#) / [H.882](#) An Act To Reduce Plastics (Sen. Rausch | Rep. Phillips)

This bill would require retail establishments to not provide a customer with a carryout bag unless the carryout bag is a recycled paper bag or a reusable bag. Food establishments would not be able to provide disposable food service ware unless it is biodegradable or compostable. Additionally, establishments would not be able to sell alcoholic beverages in plastic containers less than or equal to 100 milliliters or bottles containing 1 liter or less of non-carbonated, non-flavored water.

[S.525](#) / [H.767](#) An Act To Reduce Single-Use Plastics From The Environment (Sen. Lewis | Rep. Ciccolo)

This bill would help reduce single use plastics by prohibiting the sale and distribution of numerous single use plastics/single use items containing plastic. It also includes requirements for the removal of toxic substances in beverage containers, food ware, and food ware accessories.

[S.450](#) / [H.770](#) An Act Reducing Packaging Waste (Sen. Creem | Rep. Connolly)

This bill requires food service ware in retail food establishments to be biodegradable, compostable, recyclable, or reusable for any food prepared or packaged on-premises

Public Lands protections

[H.904](#) An Act relative to increased protection of wildlife management areas (Rep. Sena)

This bill would expand and make permanent the existing system of reserves on public Wildlife Management Areas administered by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. It would direct the designation by 2030 of at least 30%, or about 51,000 acres, of the agency's lands, consistent with the latest biological and climate science, and would give these areas permanent protection.

[H.894](#) An Act relative to forest management and practices guidelines (Rep. Sabadosa)

This bill would establish a new council of stakeholders to oversee 5-year reviews of guidelines by the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to improve operations; increase transparency; expand sound ecologically-based practices per the latest science; implement nature-based solutions; restore native biodiversity; prepare our natural lands for climate change; and establish new land protections to meet the goal of protecting 30% of Massachusetts lands by 2030.

The bill would also remove the promotion and study of biomass from the charter of the state's Forest and Wood Products Institute at Mount Wachusett Community College.

H.895 An Act to Require Separate Carbon Accounting for Working Lands and Natural Lands and to Eliminate from Massachusetts Net-Zero Carbon Emissions Goal any Carbon Offsets Sold to Entities Outside of the Commonwealth (Rep. Sabadosa)

Massachusetts currently speaks too broadly about carbon sequestration for its natural and working lands, which hampers our ability to set and achieve meaningful goals. This bill would require separate carbon goals for agricultural lands, managed forests, and protected forests. It would also guarantee that only lands within Massachusetts are considered when meeting these targets, thereby eliminating any potential circumventions that could use lands outside the state, which may have been preserved without intervention. This bill is endorsed by the Wendell State Forest Alliance.

S.452 An Act establishing the Municipal Reforestation Program (Sen. Creem)

This bill establishes an urban forestry council that advises and supports participating municipalities in accessing funding and technical assistance to plant and replace trees and maintain and preserve healthy trees within the borders of their communities. It is the next iteration of S.504/H.905 from last session, but it is targeted more specifically to communities lacking tree canopy coverage to promote increased tree equity.

Over 6,000 bills have been filed this session, and many align with the Sierra Club's vision. A preliminary list of supported bills can be found on our website:

www.sierraclub.org/massachusetts/2023-2024-legislative-priorities. We expect this list of supported bills to grow in the coming months as more bills surface.