

Energy Efficiency Advisory Council
Public Hearing
January 10, 2012

Hello, my name is Kalila Barnett, Executive Director, of Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), in Dudley Square in Roxbury. ACE is an environmental justice organization and our mission is to build the power of communities of color and low income communities in Massachusetts to eradicate environmental racism and classism, create healthy, sustainable communities, and achieve environmental justice. We are a steering committee member of the Green Justice Coalition, a broad-based partnership that has grown to more than 50 organizations that is working to build a socially just and environmentally sustainable economy, and together we represent over 100,000 ratepayers throughout Massachusetts.

Many of the urban areas we work in deal daily with hazards from midnight dumping of chemical wastes on vacant lots, toxic industrial emissions into the air and water, substandard housing contaminated with lead paint, traffic congestion and inadequate mass transportation systems, few parks or recreational spaces, unsightly trash, and a variety of unwanted land uses. The fact that a person living in a community of color is 39 times more likely to live in one of these environmentally-burdened communities, is not just a statistic, but a harsh reality that our members and leaders live and breathe everyday. We are the ones in Roxbury dealing with asthma rates five times the state average and unemployment rates 60% higher than any other neighborhood in Boston.

The Green Justice Coalition truly appreciates the relationships we have been able to build with many of you on the Energy Efficiency Advisory Council and staff at the utility companies. We have worked closely with members of this council and with staff at NSTAR, and National Grid implementing our Community Mobilization Initiatives and are grateful to have been able to see those projects come to fruition. Open public hearings like these are great opportunities for groups like ours to have our recommendations heard and are glad you have created this space to do that.

As you know, the Green Justice Coalition has been primarily focused on working with the State and the utility companies to expand residential access to energy efficiency programs and create job opportunities in this sector with livable wages, good benefits and career pathways for local residents. Over the past 4 years, we have engaged thousands of working class community members across the state, talking to them about their utility usage and their knowledge of and access to energy efficiency opportunities for their homes. Through community organizing, we have developed a good understanding of some of the major barriers to moving energy efficiency programs to scale. And through strategic discussions with coalition partners, we have offered recommendations on how to best address some of these challenges.

For us, the new 3 year plans are more than just about creating jobs and saving a few people some money on fuel costs. More importantly, it is about the unique opportunity we have now within our power, within our reach to reverse the environmental injustices communities of color and low income communities have had to endure and to rebuild our communities in more healthy and sustainable ways. It is about defining green jobs as good jobs, with family sustaining wages, good benefits and career pathways. It is about making sure that everyone, not just a privileged few, has access to the same energy efficiency programs that they themselves are paying into.

The Green Justice Coalition believes that without the Green Communities Act, we would not have had the opportunity to have this deep level of participation in this process from the most systematically marginalized communities in our Commonwealth. It has been an important tool in promoting democracy and innovation, core values and principles all of us care about. We all now understand that we will not meet the goals of the Act without all of us working together and recognizing the importance of justice and equity in our work moving forward. The Green Justice Coalition has several recommendations for what Program Administrators should include in the next set of three year plans. Our recommendations are aimed at improving access to residents earning 60 to 120 percent of the state median income, promoting equity and transparency in the energy efficiency sector. With that in mind, we respectfully recommend the following for inclusion in the next 3 year energy efficiency plans:

- ***Marketing programs and budgets should include innovative community-driven strategies as part of the overall toolkit.*** Drawing from the positive lessons in our Community Mobilization Initiatives, the next 3-year plans should allow marketing budgets to reflect a proven outreach strategy, particularly for “hard-to-reach/hard-to-serve” communities, including tenants. Partnering with organizations that have existing relationships with home and building owners as well as tenants, has given access to ratepayers who would not otherwise have the information they need to participate in energy efficiency programs and understand the benefits of energy efficiency work.

I will now let my friends and Green Justice Coalition allies Rich Rogers, and Gladys Vega go through the rest of our coalition’s recommendations.

Kalila Barnett
Executive Director
Alternatives for Community and Environment