July 22, 2016

Dear Governor Cuomo, Mr. Kauffman, and Chair Zibelman:

We, the undersigned 106 elected officials and organizations, are deeply concerned about the large sum of money that is now being proposed to subsidize and bail out the nuclear industry through the New York State Clean Energy Standard. Up until two weeks ago, New Yorkers were told that the nuclear subsidy would cost $270 million over 12 years to support several unprofitable upstate nuclear power plants - namely FitzPatrick, Ginna and Nine Mile Point. Now it has been proposed that New Yorkers will give the nuclear industry nearly $8 billion to subsidize these power plants in an effort to bail them out from their financial troubles. Residents, businesses, and municipalities across New York will see their electricity bills go up in order to support the nuclear industry while reputable agencies have said we do not need the energy from some of these power plants to supply our state’s energy needs.

This is one of the largest corporate bailouts in New York’s history and it will benefit only one company, Exelon Corporation. The public has been given only 10 business days to comment on the new version of this nuclear subsidy, apparently because Exelon has said it needs certainty in order to make its business decisions. It is not the role of the public to bail out and pay a corporation to maintain a failing business for their private profit.

The public has been given two reasons for this massive nuclear bailout: to save nuclear jobs and that fossil fuel use will increase if the nuclear plants shut down. Yet available information reveals that these concerns may be unfounded. The $7.6 billion sum is an extraordinary amount of ratepayers' money to support approximately 2,000 jobs, and in fact many of those nuclear jobs - approximately half of these jobs - could continue for years after the plants have closed because there is significant cleanup, dismantlement, and waste management work to be done even after a plant retires. What's more, putting that money toward renewable energy and energy efficiency would create many, many more jobs.

Regarding energy reliability and fossil fuel use, the New York Independent System Operator (NYISO), the agency responsible for ensuring a reliable electricity supply, has determined that the FitzPatrick and Ginna nuclear plants can shut down immediately with no reliability impacts and no need for new coal or gas power plants. Meanwhile, energy efficiency and wind can already be purchased for less than the price that Exelon is demanding to keep its plants in business.

The sudden new proposal to increase and lock in $7.6 billion in subsidies to nuclear plants for 12 years is being rushed forward with very little explanation. We are alarmed. New Yorkers deserve a full accounting of this proposal. Please see the questions below that we, residents, organizations and elected officials, have about this massive nuclear subsidy and bailout. Until these questions are answered, the Public Service Commission should not move forward with a vote on the Nuclear Tier of the Clean Energy Standard proceeding.

1. How much will this nuclear subsidy impact electricity bills? Please provide details on the increased cost for residents, businesses, and municipalities.
2. What is the basis for saying that we need this energy from nuclear when the New York State Independent System Operator and other independent experts have determined that both FitzPatrick and Ginna nuclear reactors can close while coal and gas plants also shut down in NY with no threat to the reliability of the electricity system?

3. Has the Department of Public Service (DPS) done an independent analysis to compare the $7.6 billion cost of bailing out the upstate nuclear reactors to the cost of quickly expanding energy efficiency retrofits and renewable energy? Furthermore, has DPS modeled how many jobs would be created for New Yorkers if the money went to energy efficiency and renewable energy? Please provide this analysis.

4. If renewable energy and energy efficiency options were fast-tracked over the next few years instead of subsidizing the nuclear reactors, what would the overall effect be on New York’s greenhouse gas emissions? Please provide this modeling and analysis.

5. To what extent has your Administration negotiated with Exelon Corporation to provide this 12-year, multi-billion-dollar subsidy?

6. The latest nuclear subsidy proposal includes a claim that the upstate nuclear plants provide $5 billion in benefits to New Yorkers over two years, but provides no detailed explanation of where those benefits come from and to whom they would go. Please provide an accounting of those benefits authored by independent researchers or by government agencies.

7. Have state agencies done any analysis into how much it would cost to re-train nuclear workers in renewable energy and efficiency jobs and/or provide temporary wage assistance instead of subsidizing nuclear power plants?

8. Given that municipalities and school districts with nuclear power plants currently rely on them for municipal tax and school district revenues, has your administration analyzed how the state could aid and support these communities if these nuclear power plants close, similar to what your Administration did with allocating $30 million in the 2016 NYS budget for large power plant closures? If so, please provide that analysis.

We support your efforts to implement an enforceable renewable energy policy through the proposed Clean Energy Standard. We encourage you to move forward with the Renewable Tiers described in the proposed policy as soon as possible. However, given the concerns that we and others have raised about the Nuclear Tier and the unanswered questions surrounding the nuclear bailout, we strongly urge you to delay a decision on the $7.6 billion nuclear subsidies until these questions are answered.

Sincerely,

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Member, Town Board
Lima, New York

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Ulysses Town Clerk
Trumansburg, NY

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Tompkins County Legislature Representative  
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Bergen County Green Party
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Beyond Nuclear
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Carbon Tax Center
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Catskill Mountainkeeper
Wes Gillingham, Program Director
Livingston Manor, NY

CEO Pipe Organs/Golden Ponds Farm
Corey E. Olsen, Owner/Activist
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Citizens’ Environmental Coalition
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Coalition Against Nukes
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Green Party of Onondaga
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Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World
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Mid-Hudson Sierra Club
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Minnesota Natural Health Coalition
Lee Beaty, President
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MK Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence
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New York State Sustainable Business Council
Hillary Baum
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New Yorkers for Clean Water
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Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson
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New York City, NY

Occupy Bergen County
Sally J. Gellert, member
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Ontario Clean Air Alliance
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Diana Wright, Facilitator
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Peace Action New York State
Jim Anderson, President
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Peace Action of Staten Island
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People for Animal Rights
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Buffalo, NY

Port Hope Community Health Concerns Committee
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Port Hope, Ontario, Canada
Promoting Health and Sustainable Energy
Susan Shapiro, Director
Nanuet, NY

Protect Orange County.org
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Psychologists for Social Responsibility -- Environmental Action Group
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Public Citizen
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PUSH Buffalo
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Residents Allied for the Future of Tioga (RAFT)
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ShaleshockCNY
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Sierra Club Niagara Group
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Syracuse Cultural Workers
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