



August 5, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The American Association of Blacks in Energy and the Bipartisan Policy Center are writing to urge Congress to pass the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* that comprises a once-in-a-generation investment in our country and people to create jobs, accelerate the clean energy transition, and grow the economy sustainably and equitably. AABE and BPC are partnering on a series of stakeholder engagements on environmental justice and clean energy infrastructure because of our shared belief that our nation's strength and success depend upon engaging, understanding, and integrating diverse views into durable policy solutions.

The Senate bipartisan infrastructure legislation is a critical first step in addressing long-standing infrastructure disparities that affect many communities across the country and disproportionately impact communities of color—like exposure to environmental pollution; access to clean air and water; access to efficient, reliable, and affordable energy and transportation options; and deferred maintenance of our nation's infrastructure systems. We ask that you include additional provisions for inclusive planning and implementation of these historic investments in energy, transportation, water, and land management.

Specifically, communities of color must have a seat at the table as federal agencies scope and implement new or expanded federal clean energy infrastructure programs. Intentional inclusion and transparency are vital to ensuring investments are allocated in a manner that upholds commitments of equity and justice. Policy provisions should enhance the ability of impacted communities to assume greater authority and responsibility over their built and natural environments to assure justice and equity in environmental outcomes, especially as it relates to human health and preservation of the natural environment.

In addition, historically disadvantaged communities must be materially improved by the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's* investments. Below we highlight a few key provisions in the bill that, if implemented conscientiously and in partnership with affected communities, would redress legacy pollution and infrastructure impacts, broaden access to the benefits of modernized infrastructure and clean energy systems, and create stable and lasting economic and job opportunities for all Americans, especially those that have been underserved.



Electrical grid modernization

We support Congress prioritizing necessary investments in grid modernization. As extreme weather events continue to test the resilience of our power infrastructure, robust funding is required to enable upgrades, expand transmission, and integrate renewable energy sources onto the grid. We urge Congress to build on this progress by ensuring that communities of color are included in planning for the distribution and deployment of modernization investments and resources. These efforts must also account for uneven economic burdens placed on communities resulting from new technology implementation and provide cost-saving options for energy insecure households. Finally, we support provisions in the bill that give priority to small and minority-owned businesses for contracting and project development.

Clean transit and buses

Recognizing the transportation sector's large contribution to national total greenhouse gas emissions—and current imbalances in the distribution of public transit options across urban, suburban, and rural communities—we strongly support the modernization of America's transit system. Transit investments are vital to low-income populations and communities of color, which are two times as likely to take public transportation and may lack access to other transportation options. We applaud the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's* pivotal investments in public transit—particularly low- or zero-emissions bus transit systems and clean school buses. These investments will further drive demand for domestic production of batteries and vehicles, generating jobs and bolstering manufacturing industries.

Electric vehicle infrastructure expansion

We commend Congress for its inclusion of EV infrastructure investments in the framework, in recognition of the fact that EVs are key to a clean energy future. We urge Congress, however, to account for current substantial inequities of EV access and affordability for communities of color. We strongly recommend that charging infrastructure planning and deployment elevate members of these communities—as well as members of rural, disadvantaged, and hard-to-reach communities—to guarantee that that all areas have access to (i) charging stations in residential facilities and communities; (ii) public transportation and car sharing; and (iii) commercial infrastructure and opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises serving communities of color. Congress should also consider other zero- or low-emission fuel sources that are not dependent on grid modernization to deliver needed improvements in air quality while reducing emissions, including compressed renewable natural gas, fuel cells, and hybrid electric technologies.

Community-level investments in clean drinking water, high-speed internet, and reconnection

Low-income households, communities of color, and indigenous communities in both urban and rural areas have been disproportionately affected by lack of access to clean drinking water, the digital divide, and neighborhood disconnection and disinvestment caused by legacy transportation infrastructure. We commend Congress for including necessary and substantial funding in the bipartisan infrastructure deal for clean water and lead pipe replacement; broadband infrastructure deployment (particularly in rural and tribal communities) and programs to support broadband affordability for low-income families; and dedicated funding for planning, design, demolition, and



reconstruction of street grids, parks, or other infrastructure to reconnect communities divided by transportation infrastructure.

Built and natural infrastructure resilience

The effects of a changing climate are becoming more immediate and severe for all Americans, but communities of color too often bear the burden of these impacts. AABE and BPC support the proposed investments to enhance the resilience of built and natural infrastructure to floods, fires, and other threats. We also commend the inclusion of funding for tribal climate resilience, adaptation, and community relocation planning, design, and project implementation. Because urban and rural underserved populations and tribal communities are more likely to live in areas most vulnerable to these extreme events, they are more often displaced by severe weather, with limited means or opportunities to return and rebuild. Communities of color must therefore be highly involved in climate-related disaster mitigation planning, including efforts to weatherize homes.

Pollution remediation and workforce development

While much of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* focuses on programs to prevent *new* pollution into the environment, AABE and BPC urge Congress to continue support for addressing legacy pollution in our air, water, and soil which has too often affected those of color and lower income. The bill includes funding for plugging orphaned well sites, remediating abandoned hardrock mine lands, reclaiming abandoned coal mines, and cleaning up brownfield and superfund sites. We underscore the importance of these actions to address legacy pollution while also avoiding unintended consequences of accelerated gentrification and displacement of the existing community. Project plans need to incorporate effective means to mitigate the market effects of remediation on land value and subsequent land use so that communities in-place enjoy the benefits. Further, as this necessary remediation begins, every effort should be made to ensure employment opportunities for community members and displaced workers from coal mines and other disaffected industries.

AABE and BPC look forward to sharing additional insights from our stakeholder engagements to better understand concerns and needs for environmental justice and clean energy infrastructure. The *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* represents a major down payment on resilient and clean energy infrastructure needed to reduce climate change risks, ensure American competitiveness in the new clean energy economy, and uplift underserved communities. We urge your support for robust investments and inclusive implementation of the infrastructure upgrades needed to ensure a healthy environment, prosperous economy, and equitable access to our nation's resources for all Americans today, and for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Ralph Cleveland
Interim President and CEO
American Association of Blacks in Energy

Michele Stockwell
Executive Director
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