INTRODUCTION
As Virginia begins to implement the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA), communities with fossil-fuel reliant economies face an uncertain future with an unprecedented opportunity. Coalfield communities have been experiencing the harsh reality of the declining coal industry for decades, and now more workers and communities across the entire Commonwealth will begin to experience this challenging economic transition. As Virginia transitions to an economy based on cleaner technologies, it has the opportunity to implement policies which revitalize and prioritize people most impacted by the transitions, and to grow the workforce as we push to create a clean economy for all.

BACKGROUND
WORKFORCE TRANSITION
Approximately 80 fossil fuel power plants are currently operational in Virginia and will be retired within the next 30 years in order to meet the state’s carbon goals. Fossil fuel infrastructure is disproportionately located in low-income communities and communities of color. It is critical to engage impacted people in economic transition planning and decision-making, and ensure they benefit from the wealth created by the clean energy economy. Approximately 14,000 Virginians are directly employed in coal and gas extraction, and 10,000 are employed in fossil fuel electricity generation, transmission, and distribution. Many of these jobs will be lost in the coming decades.

At the same time, the VCEA is estimated to create 13,000 jobs per year in the advanced energy industry, with wages that are generally higher than the national average. The growing clean energy industries will need more workers, and new energy facilities will have an increasing impact on local communities. Public education, workforce training, research, and job transition support programs are needed to transition people to new jobs in the clean energy workforce and train future generations to fill the growing industry need. The VCEA took the first step of prioritizing disadvantaged communities and communities near fossil fuel infrastructure. However, the Commonwealth will need to take additional steps to invest in these communities in ways that are consistent with the notion of a “Just Transition” that aims to alleviate the geographically concentrated, negative impacts of job and economic loss associated with the closure of fossil-fuel industries.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE ENERGY INDUSTRY
We are changing the way we produce energy and now have a responsibility to ensure that vulnerable communities are not left behind. These communities have borne many burdens in order to provide the fuel that powered this nation. Justice requires that these legacy impacts be addressed and that communities be compensated and prioritized in the transition.

BUILDING AN EQUITABLE CLEAN ENERGY ECONOMY FOR COMMUNITIES AND WORKERS

Though shutting down a fossil fuel facility leads to better environmental quality and human health, it also causes loss of jobs and tax revenue for local governments. Shuttered power plants and mines and bankrupt fossil-fuel companies leave behind environmental hazards such as coal ash and unreclaimed mines sites, but there is insufficient funding to clean them up. Compounding the problem, the places where power plants or mining operations are shut down are often not the best sites for clean energy infrastructure. As new energy resources are constructed, the communities that are losing the economic benefits of fossil fuel production aren’t necessarily the same communities reaping the benefits of the replacement industries.

Other kinds of clean-up are also needed to revitalize the impacted communities. Specifically, fossil-fuel-impacted communities have (or are at risk of having) numerous brownfield sites and abandoned buildings, but do not have sufficient funding to clean-up and redevelop these sites, harming economic development and impacting public health.

Declining tax revenue further impacts the ability of local districts and municipalities to maintain and invest in critical infrastructure such as water and housing. Additionally, coal and gas infrastructure has distressed water resources, leaving many households without adequate water access.
Programs such as brownfield redevelopment grants can help ensure the new energy industry brings wealth to communities hurting the most from the transition. Legislators must prioritize support for transitioning communities through economic diversification programs, physical infrastructure funding to ensure new businesses can move in and to lift struggling communities out of poverty, and funding for the clean up of environmental hazards. Energy research and educational programs can bring new industries to impacted communities while meeting the industry's workforce needs.

**CONCLUSION**

Virginia has made great strides in addressing the challenge of climate change, but the Commonwealth must prioritize the needs of people and communities in the clean energy transition to ensure it is just, reaches our full clean energy potential, and addresses the harms of the extractive and destructive fossil-fuel industry, consistent with the principles of environmental justice. We must optimize this moment in order to connect low-income and frontline communities to healthier environments, new jobs, and economic opportunities in the clean energy economy.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Establish a Virginia Just Transition Office**
  Coordinated with the Environmental Justice Council. The office must be driven by an advisory committee of diverse community stakeholders who are charged with developing Just Transition Plans with impacted stakeholders and advising the state legislature and regulators on policy related to economic transition, long-term health care, and environmental remediation. The office must rely on robust community-based and expert-informed planning processes.

- **Provide workforce training and reemployment**
  Services to workers and communities with historically fossil-fuel reliant economies. Prioritize individuals impacted by mine and plant closures and provide income support while workers are in transition.

- **Establish a Community Redevelopment Fund**
  To provide immediate employment for people in transitioning communities and climate-resilient infrastructure. The Fund should support public infrastructure projects, reclamation of brownfields, and energy efficiency services. The Fund should be paired with workforce training programs to ensure local people can fill the necessary jobs.

- **Each utility’s triennial integrated resource plan**
  Must include the anticipated closure date of every fossil-fuel power plant that is required to close under the Virginia Clean Economy Act. Every three years, upon approval of the resource plan, this anticipated closure schedule must also be provided to the DMME, Virginia Employment Commission, and power plant employees, and posted publicly.

- **Require that state-funded workforce programs**
  Serve people who are representative of the diverse population of Virginia.

- **Work to ensure that Virginia has the needed workforce to meet clean energy targets.**
  This can be done through tax incentives for corporate retraining programs, implementation of a Green Career and Technical Education Dual Enrollment program for high school students, as well as grants for community colleges with high enrollment in pertinent programs.