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THE COMMUNITY DESIGN CENTER OF NEW YORK'S CAPITAL REGION

Date: July 2025

To: New York State Energy and Climate Policy Stakeholders

Subject: Urgent Action Needed to Restore EmPower+ Funding and Prevent Energy Redlining

Executive Summary

EmPower+, NYSERDA's flagship program for low- and moderate-income (LMI) household energy efficiency and electrification, faces devastating cuts just as demand and enrollment reach record highs. Project volume is set to plummet by over 70% by 2028, threatening public health, workforce stability, and the state's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA/Climate Act) equity goals.

Key Issues

- **Drastic Program Reductions:** Project completions will fall from over 30,000 in 2024 to just 11,100 in 2027 and decrease further by 2030, a critical deadline for Climate Act goals.
- **Funding Shortfall:** Despite a modest ratepayer increase from the Public Service Commission, cuts to flexible state funding (e.g., Clean Energy Fund) leave the program underfunded.
- **Equity at Risk:** Disadvantaged communities (DACs) will lose access to vital services like heating system repair and weatherization, deepening historic disinvestment through **energy redlining**.
- **Workforce Impacts:** Contractors across NYS were told by NYSERDA to scale up but are now laying off workers. Long-term damage to the workforce pipeline will hinder electrification goals.
- **Administrative Barriers:** New "provisional approval" waitlists and contractor application bans are reducing access, especially for vulnerable residents and those with limited internet access.

Immediate Recommendations

- **Allocate Sustainable Future Fund Resources:** At least \$250M remains unallocated and could stabilize EmPower+ through 2028.
- **Restore Flexible NYSERDA Funds:** Redirect Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) or Clean Energy Fund reserves to cover LMI services and prevent cuts to EmPower+.

Why It Matters

New York cannot meet its Climate Act obligations or protect its most vulnerable residents without a strong, stable EmPower+ program. EmPower+ is not just a weatherization program; it is a lifeline for low- and moderate-income households facing high energy burdens, unsafe housing conditions, and limited access to clean energy technologies. Immediate intervention is essential to preserve progress on equity, health, and climate, while maintaining compliance with the Climate Act.

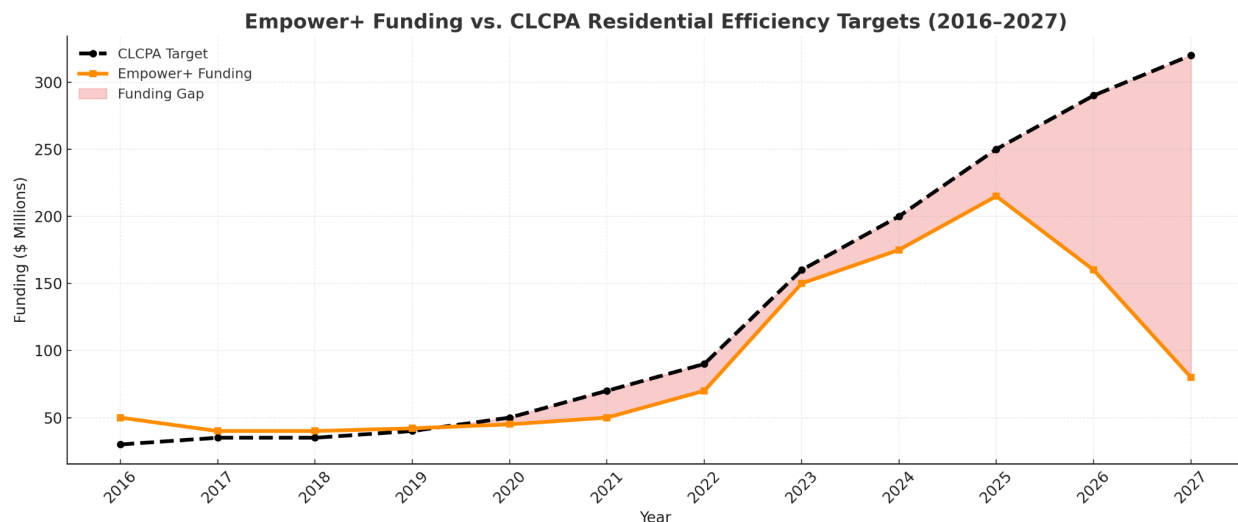


Figure 1: Anticipated Empower+ Funding Discrepancy Compared with Modeled CLCPA Targets

As utility rates rise, federal assistance programs shrink, and the effects of climate change intensify in the form of floods, fires, and heat waves, New York remains a steadfast policy leader nationwide. EmPower+ represents one of the few tools the state has to provide direct relief for LMI residents, while advancing emissions reductions and energy equity. It is also the primary vehicle through which the state delivers on its statutory goal that 35-40% of the benefits of climate investments reach disadvantaged communities.

Allowing this program to contract while demand is growing sends a dangerous signal: that our most climate-vulnerable populations can be deprioritized. It threatens to erode public trust in clean energy initiatives, destabilize the energy efficiency workforce, and deepen the racial and economic inequities the CLCPA was designed to correct. Without intervention, thousands of homes will remain unhealthy, inefficient, and unaffordable, while the trained labor force needed to electrify New York will dissipate.

Immediate action to restore and expand EmPower+ is not only fiscally responsible—it is ethically and strategically necessary to fulfill New York’s climate, health, and housing goals.