August 23, 2019

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Executive Chamber
Capitol Building
Albany, N.Y. 12224

RE: S.6265-A (Gianaris)/A.8083 (Niou)
Ensuring Private Utility Employees Receive Prevailing Wage

Dear Governor Cuomo,

On behalf of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, New York’s largest volunteer led environmental organization of 50,000 members statewide, I urge you to sign into law S.6265-A/A.8083, an act that would build upon Article 9 of the Labor Law – to extend prevailing wage requirements to building service workers performing services for private utilities.

Since our formation in 1892, the Sierra Club is best known as a conservation and environmental advocacy organization. But with the advent of the climate crisis it has been increasingly difficult to separate our fight against the proliferation of fossil fuel based greenhouse gasses from the root causes of inequity in our energy economy - that constrain solutions and give enormous power to the very few.

We appreciate that New York State has enacted labor requirements for its own agencies, making sure that those workers who ennable themselves by working for and in support of the people of New York State do not receive lower wages than those prevailing in the private sector with comparable employment. We are also pleased to see that prevailing wage standards have been required in solicitations issued by state authorities for certain utility scale renewable energy projects and the requirement for project labor agreements on offshore wind projects.

In this context, it makes perfect sense to extend building service worker prevailing wage requirements to privately owned utility companies in NY – as the nature of electrical, gas, water and steam generation and distribution constitutes an essential public service that resembles a public entity- with legal monopolization, guaranteed rates and profits, and other exclusive rights. With these unique privileges, private utilities must be required to take public responsibility for the wages and welfare of their employees.
Thanks to your leadership, Governor Cuomo, New York has just enacted the historic Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) a law that will commit NY to a 70% renewable energy grid by 2030 and a 100% carbon neutral grid by 2040, putting the Empire State ahead of the rest of the country in the generation sector. This ambitious transition requires that we move towards a zero-carbon society where our entire transportation, heating, industrial and building sectors will be electrified by 2050. Under this ambitious plan, New York's private utilities will play an important role in helping shape the clean energy transition and ensuring our state achieves a zero-carbon energy future.

The Sierra Club stands with our labor partners and agrees that it is time to extend high road labor standards to these companies. As we build the best clean energy economy in the nation we need to ensure New York’s workforce is uplifted and paid family wages through standards enshrined in law. Guaranteeing prevailing wages to building service workers who contribute to the supply of our state’s energy is a foundational step to assuring New York continues to lead the way in building a climate justice legacy.

Thank you for all you do to protect New York’s environment, workers and communities.

Sincerely,

Roger Downs
Conservation Director
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter