PURPOSE: To encourage the reuse of decommissioned or dormant electric generating sites for renewable energy purposes; this bill will help the fight against climate change while protecting the economies and tax bases of impacted communities.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT: The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act has provided the enforceable structure by which the state has to achieve a 100% renewable energy grid by 2040 and carbon neutrality by 2050. But New York is still struggling, especially now with COVID debt, to finance the transition from fossil fuels to wind, solar and energy storage. The gradual retiring of the state’s remaining fossil fuel generating facilities over the next 20 years will systematically reduce carbon emissions from the state’s electric sector, but it will also remove their central financial contributions to local tax bases — potentially hurting employment, gutting school funding and other ancillary benefits. These plants have sustained small upstate communities for years, even as they have poisoned our air and contributed to global climate change. What is needed is transition planning that will allow sustainable redevelopment of these sites to stabilize the tax base and support the local work force. Without it, we will continue to see irrational energy decisions that prolong the operations of fossil fuel facilities – not because the power is essential for reliability, but because the reduction in tax base to localities is too politically unpalatable to allow.

Fortunately, old fossil fuel generating sites come with massive electrical infrastructure making them ideal places for renewable energy development, battery storage and centers of interconnection for smart grids and new efficient transmission lines. S 1829 directs NYSERDA to produce a report analyzing the feasibility of siting renewable energy sources at decommissioned or dormant electric generating sites and creates a program to facilitate those smart redevelopment ideas, based upon the NYSERDA feasibility report, starting with the Lovett Power Plant in Rockland County.

It is abundantly clear that the entire reconstruction of New York’s energy grid, efficiency retrofits, and the manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines, and smart grid hubs will create tens of thousands of new jobs and help rebuild our COVID ravaged economy. But if we are not strategically looking at underlying community tax base issues as fossil fuel infrastructure is phased out, then cash strapped communities may be a great stumbling block to this great energy transition. S1829 will give us more tools to overcome these barriers.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter urges your support of this important legislation.