

***Delaware Riverkeeper Network ~ Clean Water Action
American Littoral Society ~ Environment New Jersey
NJ Highlands Coalition ~ NJ Sierra Club***

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Trenton, NJ – A bipartisan supermajority of the Senate Environment Committee today passed SCR134, a proposal to amend the New Jersey Constitution’s Declaration of Rights to include environmental rights. The bill, proposed by Senator Linda Greenstein (D-14) as prime and Senator Kip Bateman (R-16) as co-prime, would amend Article 1 of the state constitution to recognize that “Every person has a right to a clean and healthy environment...”, that the State has a duty to serve as trustee of the state’s natural resources, and must conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all people.

“Here in New Jersey we have long been a leader in protecting our environment while at the same time advancing sustainable development, clean energy, solid economic growth. This amendment will ensure that every government official, now and into the future, will give protecting the right to clean water, clean air, a stable climate and a healthy environment the same high priority in decision making as protecting property rights, civil rights, political rights and advancing sustainable industries, energy and development. Senator Bateman and I believe that environmental protection is a human rights issue, not a political issue, and that is why we are working together, on a bipartisan basis, to put forth this New Jersey Green Amendment,” **said Senator Greenstein.**

“The right to clean air and water, and a healthy environment, are self-evident but they need to be embedded in the constitution. I look forward to working with Senator Greenstein, my other legislative colleagues, Maya van Rossum the Delaware Riverkeeper who’s taken the lead on this, and all stakeholders to get this done this session,” **added Senator Bateman.**

According to the For The Generations initiative, only two states currently have a constitutional provision that recognizes environmental rights on par with other fundamental rights like the right to free speech.

Testifying at the hearing in support of the bill were:

- Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and author of the award winning book *The Green Amendment* that laid the foundation for advancement of this New Jersey constitutional call to action;
- Jordan Yeager, with the law firm of Curtin and Heefner, the attorney who represented van Rossum and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network in the 2013 lawsuit that advanced constitutional rights in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by breathing legal life into that state’s constitutional environmental rights provision;
- Janine Bauer, Attorney in Private Practice in Lawrenceville, NJ.

van Rossum spoke on behalf of the environmental community and submitted a letter of support signed by 34 organizations.

“Given that we all depend upon clean water, clean air & a healthy environment to support and sustain our very lives, it is right and appropriate that they should be protected with the same legal vigor and strength that we protect other fundamental rights, such as the right to free speech and freedom of religion. Senator Greenstein and Senator Bateman’s bipartisan leadership in advancing this proposed constitutional green amendment shows that here in New Jersey our legislators put people first, rather than politics,” **said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and author of the award-winning book *The Green Amendment*.**

Former State Senator Lesniak who sponsored some of the most significant environmental protection laws in the nation said, “The Green Amendment is needed to protect the health and welfare of our country and of the planet when state and federal politicians fail to do so.”

“You should not have to worry about the air you breathe or the water you drink regardless of what zip code you live in, how much money you make or the color of your skin,” **stated Amy Goldsmith, NJ State Director of Clean Water Action.** “This amendment is a civil rights, not just an environmental, issue. It gives NJ a legally enforceable tool against polluters and the harm caused by the cumulative impacts of toxics that low income areas and communities of color are disproportionately exposed to everyday. That's environmental justice!”

“Today moves New Jersey forward when it comes to protecting people’s rights to clean air, water, and natural resources. The amendment will work on behalf of the people and for their right to protect public health, the environment, and our precious natural resources,” **said Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.** “We want to thank Senators Greenstein and Bateman for their leadership on this important amendment that will help protect our families and our future.”

“New Jersey voters expect our environmental protections are a core part of our state laws, but right now, environmental rights aren't reflected in our State Constitution. The Green Amendment will change that forever,” **said Doug O'Malley, director of Environment New Jersey.** “We need a way for the protections of our land, air and water to be core values our Constitution upholds, and we are proud to join in this grassroots effort put make our State Constitution truly green.”

“If we have unalienable rights such as life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, to own property, freedom of the press, free assembly and religion, how is it that the right to an environment where human life can safely inhabit isn't among them? For without this fundamental right, other basic human rights cannot exist. Simply put, the NJ Constitution has an error of omission that we aim to correct,” **said Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.**

“The Green Amendment is a formal recognition that we all have an inherent right to a clean and healthy environment, and that New Jersey’s natural resources belong to everyone. It reinforces the idea that the State of New Jersey holds these rights in the public trust and is responsible for safeguarding them for all. New Jersey Conservation Foundation wholeheartedly endorses this measure and applauds the legislature for advancing it,” **said Alison Mitchell, NJCF’s Policy Director.**

“Clean water and air are fundamental human rights. The Green Amendment will ensure that those rights are constitutionally protected and secures our government's obligation to protect those rights,” **said Jennifer M. Coffey, Executive Director of ANJEC.**

"It is high time to grant every person the right to a clean and healthy environment and to require that State decision-making consider the effects on pure water, clean air other important environmental resources," **stated Dante DiPirro, President of the Board of the Sourland Conservancy.**

"The rights articulated in the proposed NJ Green Amendment - a clean and healthy environment, pure water, clean air, ecologically healthy habitats, and the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and esthetic qualities of the environment, are as fundamental as the unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These environmental rights, in fact, make those three rights possible. Without a clean environment it is impossible to live a full life, have the liberty to explore the wonders of nature and be able to enjoy nature free from the fears and concerns that dirty environments bring with them. Had the founding fathers been able to foresee the degradation and devastation we have wrought and continue to afflict on the environment and all life forms including ourselves they would certainly have included the rights in the Green Amendment in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution," **said Ken Dolsky, with the Coalition Against Pilgrim Pipeline.**

"New Jersey League of Conservation Voters is excited to see the Green Amendment move forward, and we look forward to a future where our clean drinking water and clean air is a constitutional right for all businesses and families in our state. New Jersey voters have proven time and time again that when they show up to vote, they vote for the environment. With New Jersey LCV's leadership on the important 2017 Natural Resource Damages constitutional amendment, which passed with overwhelming voter approval, we stand ready to make clean water, air, and lands a constitutional right. The Green Amendment will be another win for environmental voters," **said Ed Potosnak, Executive Director of New Jersey League of Conservation Voters.**

"NJ desperately needs the SCR134 amendment. As the most built out, climate change vulnerable ocean state with a UNESCO biosphere, we simply cannot hope to retain healthy, productive populations of people and a healthy coastal economy if our water and air and surrounding environments are compromised. We are beyond hypothesizing the costs of environmental degradation-we have very real data showing the consequences of an ailing environment on our health and well being-and it is a fact that you need clean air and clean water to be healthy. That the right to clean water and air have been overlooked as a basic rights is tremendously unfortunate and actually not cost-effective (an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!). I so hope we can remedy that now, as climate change makes us even more vulnerable, and our amazing coastal resources alone are so essential for our personal well-being and economy. This is the least we can do for our children, and ourselves," **said Margo Pellegrino of the Blue Frontier Campaign.**

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