

January 26, 2023

Thomas Lee
Executive Director & Chief Investment Officer
New York State Teachers' Retirement System
10 Corporate Woods Drive
Albany, NY 12211

Dear Mr. Lee, Mr. Keefe and the members of the NYSTRS board:

As people of reason and faith who care for the earth, its inhabitants and its future generations, we call upon you to divest the New York State Teachers' Retirement System from fossil fuels. We are representatives of diverse faith traditions who feel compelled to speak out in opposition to funding fossil fuel projects based on our shared commitment to serve vulnerable communities and to be stewards of our earth and all its inhabitants.

Global warming caused by humans burning fossil fuels is bringing the earth ever closer to disaster. This past summer gave a glimpse of what the future will look like under climate collapse. Superstorms, extreme heat, flooding and drought are devastating communities and threatening worldwide food supplies. The poor and the most vulnerable among us will continue to suffer the most from these effects of climate change. Continued investment in the fossil fuel industry furthers this injustice.

The World Council of Churches has spoken of "the urgent concerns of churches around the world in relation to climate change and its adverse effects on the whole of creation, especially on vulnerable poor and indigenous communities, the irreversible ecological degradation and loss of biodiversity, the increased risk of social and political tensions, conflict and displacement in a climate-constrained world, and the moral imperative of fossil fuel divestment and of investing in a low-carbon path to realizing economic, social and ecological wellbeing and sustainability of the whole creation." -- *The World Council of Churches executive committee, meeting in Nanjing, China, in November 2016.*

"Experts tell us that human beings are responsible for global warming and the change in weather conditions. Logically this means that we human beings have a responsibility to reduce problems that we have caused and to finally eliminate them. Climate change is not the concern of just one or two nations. It is an issue that affects the whole of humanity and every living being on this earth. This beautiful planet is our only home. ... We have to take serious action now to protect our environment and find constructive solutions to global warming." -- *His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Message to Delegates to the COP24 UN Climate Conference, November 2018.*

"Our species, though selected to be a caretaker or steward on the earth, has been the cause of such corruption and devastation on it that we are in danger of ending life as we know it on our planet." -- *The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change.*

"The Peacemaker taught us that when you sit in council for the welfare of the people, you must not think of yourself or of your family, not even of your generation. You must make your decisions on behalf of the seven generations coming, so that they may enjoy what you have today. We see global warming as the number one issue for survival because our

leaders are mandated to think about seven generations." -- *Oren Lyons (Seneca) Faithkeeper, Onondaga Nation.*

The Torah teaches that humankind was created on Earth, in part, to care for and protect God's creation (Genesis 2:15). The Talmudic concept of *bal tashchit*, "do not destroy," was developed by the rabbis as an assertion of God's holy ownership of the land. We show our commitment to Creation and to each other by preventing the destruction and degradation of our planet. As is said in a powerful Midrash, "Do not destroy My world, for if you do, there will be nobody after you to make it right again." (Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13). It is our responsibility to preserve, protect, and nourish our planet. We have the power to take action to create a healthy and just future for ourselves and generations to come. -- *Union for Reform Judaism.*

Pope Francis in the encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*, stated "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications... It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.... There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emissions of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy" -- *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home.*

The New York State Teachers Retirement System maintains an estimated \$4.5 billion in investments in the fossil fuel industry at a time when it has become abundantly clear that this industry is causing climate change and has known for decades that its activities were warming our planet. We therefore urge you to divest the Retirement System from climate destroying fossil fuels as soon as possible. We support the Teachers Fossil Fuel Divestment Act, which would require this as a matter of law.

Divestment is an act of leadership. When NYSTRS divests it will raise public consciousness about the severity of climate change and inspire other institutions to divest. It will also be a message to the rest of the country and the rest of the world that institutions can make a difference by taking a moral stand. Over 1,000 portfolios valued at over \$8 trillion have already committed to fossil fuel divestment. NYSTRS must deny funds to the industries that are creating this crisis and join with the institutions that are demanding a sustainable future.

Not only is divestment a moral imperative, but it is also a financial one. The fossil fuel industry is poised to suffer devastating financial losses. Virtually every country in the world has committed to replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources. The resulting laws and policies will inevitably cause a decline in the value of fossil fuels investments and risk the financial stability of the retirement fund that so many New York teachers depend on.

The need for action is urgent. We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation able to do something about it. In the name of all that we hold dear in our various and mutually respectful religious practices, we the undersigned call upon you to take leadership to avert climate catastrophe and divest the teachers' retirement fund from fossil fuels.

Yours faithfully,

Rev. John Paarlberg, NY State Council of Churches Executive Committee
Maureen Thitchener, Minister Emeritus, Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua
Barbara Spink, Co-Chair, Capital Region Interfaith Creation Care Coalition
Sister Linda Neil, Capital Region Interfaith Creation Care Coalition
Michael Richardson, Co-founder and Core Organizer, Rivers & Mountains GreenFaith Circle
Jacob King, Ministerial Intern, First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany
Jack Gorman, Steering Committee, Bronx Jews for Climate Action
Barry Pendergrass, Co-Chair, Capital Region Interfaith Creation Care Coalition
Jonathan Freirich, Rabbi, Coalition Organizer, VOICE Buffalo Inc.
Rev. Robert Hoffman, Synod Administrator and Stated Clerk, Regional Synod of Albany, Reformed Church in America
Rev. Ken Scott, Pastor, The Good Shepherd, Green Island NY
The Rev. Matthew J. van Maastricht, President, Synod of Albany, Reformed Church in America
Rebecca L. Town, Vice President, Regional Synod of Albany, Reformed Church in America
Rev. Schuyler Vogel, Senior Minister, Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York
Reverend Jeffrey Courter, First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills NY
Reverend Janice W Pslm, United Methodist
Rev. Merle Showers, University United Methodist Church
Mr. Charles Manning, Albany UU
Rev. John Long, Pastoral Associate, First Presbyterian Church
Sue Tannehill, Recording Clerk, Buffalo Monthly Meeting Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Dustin Longmire, Pastor & Executive Director, Messiah Lutheran Church & the Trinity Community Center
Ms. Mary Elizabeth Vigil, St. Francis Xavier Environment Ministry, NYC
Kent Busman, Executive Director, Fowler Camp and Retreat Center
Matthew Moore, Missioner for Environmental Justice, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
Allen SW George, Priest-in-Charge, Nativity and Epiphany & Saint Simon
Rev. Maxine Barnett, All Saints' Episcopal Church, Baldwin, NY
Lawrence Provenzano, The Right Reverend, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
The Rev. Richard Witt, Executive Director, Rural & Migrant Ministry Inc.
Rev. Robert Janis, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Catskills
The Rev. Canon Claire Woodley, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island
Rev. Dustin G. Longmire, Pastor & Executive Director, Messiah Lutheran Church
Reverend John Flack, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America--Metro New York Synod
Reverend Jim Ketcham, NYS Council of Churches
Sister Bette Ann Jaster, OP, Dominican Sisters of Hope
Sister Carol DeAngelo, Sister of Charity of New York
Rev. Judith VanKennen, Emmanuel Congregational UCC
Gary VanKennen, President, New York State Council of Churches
Bart Worden, Westchester Community for Ethical Culture
Reverend Koshin Karl Bower, Tendai Buddhist Institute
Rev. Dr. Daniel Carlson, First Reformed Church of Schenectady
Roger Cook, Co-convener, Interfaith Climate Justice Community of WNY
Rev. Shirley Chan, United Church of Christ
Catherine Rieley-Goddard, Pastor, Riverside Salem UCC/DoC
Reverend Nancy Rosas, Pilgrim-St.Luke's United Church of Christ
Fr. William Weiksnar, ofm, Franciscan Friars
Ola Nosseir, Founder, Our Common Beliefs

Rev. Elizabeth Duffy, Pastor, Zion United Church of Christ
Sister Jean Sliwinski, CSSF, Provincial Sustainability Coordinator, Felician Sisters of North America
Sister Faith Colligan, DC, Coordinator of Social Justice Advocacy Projects, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise
Rev. Dr. William Huston Wilkinson, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Medina, Center for the Welcoming Way, Inc.
Robert Kazmayer, Delegate to NYSCOC, New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Min. Chibueze Okorie, The Church of Gethsemane [PC UAS]
Peter Cook, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches
Wendy Seligson, Steering Committee Member, Jewish Climate Action Network NYC
Rev. Lynn, St. Matthew UCC
Rev. Daniel Schifeling, Pastor Emeritus, Church of the Nativity United Church of Christ
Rev. David Collins, United Methodist Church of Port Washington
Romana Abelova, Pastor, United Methodist Church of Port Washington
Rev. Dr. Marsha Williams, Transitional Conference Minister, New York Conference United Church of Christ
Reverend John Sampson, Keene Valley Congregational Church
Matthew Lincoln, Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church, Buffalo
Sister Eileen O'Connor, Sisters of Mercy
Rev. Karen Brammer, Unitarian Universalist Church of Utica
Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth, United Church of Christ
Rev. Dr. Kenneth W. Neal, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev. Marjorie H. Neal, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Hope Douglas Harle-Mould, Pastor & Teacher, United Church of Christ
Jill Farnham-Us, Co Leader, Interfaith Coalition of Greater Utica
Rev. Brian Lothridge, United Methodist Church
Elisabeth Prenot, Spiritual Woman, Interfaith Council of Greater Utica
Rev. Corey Turnpenny, United Methodist Church
Liseli Haines, Clerk, Mohawk Valley Friends Meeting
Sohaib Chekima, Executive Director, Islamic Center of the Capital District
Reverend Sharon Baugh, Hope Chapel AME Zion Church
Mary Scallon, Representative for Social Action, Women in Faith
Sister Sheila Stone, Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart/Interfaith Climate Justice Community
The Rev. Dr. Leonisa Ardizzone, Peace Education Center of the Hudson Valley
Rev. Dennis McDonald, Upper Room Inclusive Catholic Community
The Revered Darienne Gagne, North Chatham UMC
Kevin Cawley, Director, Deignan Institute for Earth and Spirit at Iona University
Nancy Lorence, Coordinator, Metro NY Catholic Climate Movement
Rabbi Paula Mack Drill, Rabbi, Orangetown Jewish Center
Elder Gerry Wichrowski, Elder, Presbyterian United Church of Christ
Sister Catherine Darcy, Sister, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Judy Beers, Chair, Environmental Action Team, Presbyterian-New England Congregational Church