



Divest NY
For Immediate Release
May 25, 2021
Contact: Ruth Foster 518-588-0187

Teachers Pension Fund increases coal investments to over \$300 million

Despite the climate crisis and the coal industry's decline, NYSTRS' investments in coal increased by 6.2 million shares and \$70.5 million in fourth quarter of 2020 new report finds

(Albany) A [new report](#) released today shows that the New York State Teachers' Retirement System (NYSTRS) has more than \$300 million invested in companies with substantial coal reserves. NYSTRS owns stocks in 36 companies on the Carbon Underground Coal 100 List and increased their investments in 24 of those same companies by a total of 6.2 million shares as recently as the last quarter of 2020. This includes an addition of 1.1 million shares of the Chinese coal company, Shaanxi Coal Industry Co, that has the second largest coal reserves in the world estimated to represent 27.8 gigatonnes of CO2 emissions, more than five times the annual CO2 emissions of the United States.

The expansion of NYSTRS' investments in the dirtiest fossil fuel companies flies in the face of increased recognition that these fuels represent unprecedented financial and climate risk and are set to decline even further under recent modeling released by the [International Energy Agency](#). The chief of the IEA last week called fossil fuels "[junk investments](#)".

"As a recent public school teacher, I can tell you just how devastating it is to work so hard every day to protect our community's future and its children, only to have your pension invested in an industry that's actively harming that future and those children. The fact that coal is also such a financially risky investment of already under-paid teachers' pensions adds more insult to injury." **said Senator Jabari Brisport**, lead Senate sponsor on the [Teachers' Fossil Fuel Divestment Act](#) (S4783A/A6331A). The Act would force the pension fund to responsibly divest from coal within 1 years and from all fossil fuels within 2 years.

"In a time of rapidly increasing global temperatures reaching levels that can lead to runaway climate change, we are all being called on to play a role in reducing our collective greenhouse gas production. Continuing to invest in oil and gas companies and companies that are based on significant coal production and consumption no longer makes fiscal sense and puts the future of our youth at stake. The bill I have introduced with Senator Brisport requiring the NYS Teachers' Retirement System to divest \$4 billion from fossil fuel companies, including \$311 million from coal is an investment in the future teachers are working so hard to build." said **Assembly Member Anna Kelles**, who is Assembly lead sponsor of the Teachers Divestment Act which now has more than 62 sponsors.

NYSTRS has over \$120 billion in assets making it the second largest pension fund in New York State and one of the ten largest in the country. The New York State Common Retirement Fund (CRF) that is overseen by Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli is the largest New York pension.

Comptroller DiNapoli divested the CRF from 22 coal companies in July 2020 as part of his Climate Action Plan. “Investors who fail to face the risks and seize the opportunities presented by climate change put their portfolios in jeopardy,” DiNapoli said [in his press release announcing the coal review](#) and divestment process. “We are assessing minimum standards for transition readiness at coal mining companies first, because they face the greatest risk as the world turns to cleaner and renewable energies.” Most recently, the CRF divested from [oil sands companies](#) and is now reviewing shale oil and gas investments.

Out of the 22 coal companies that Comptroller DiNapoli divested from, NYSTRS still owns stocks in seven of them worth \$9.6 million. NYSTRS’ investments in 5 of these seven companies increased in the last quarter of 2020.

“The blindfold needs to be taken off. We are far too deep into the climate crisis to be taking steps backwards. My teachers who are working tirelessly to cultivate my mind for the future should not be receiving their pension funds from the investments made in the destruction of my future,” **said Mandy Berghela, a high school student and member of the New York Youth Climate Leaders.**

Teachers have expressed support for divestment. Sixteen NYSUT locals [submitted resolutions calling on NYSTRS to divest](#) including the statewide UUP, PSC CUNY, Buffalo, Albany and Troy locals. These resolutions were sent to NYSUT’s general assembly. Last year, NYSUT passed a resolution in support of divestment. NYSTRS, which has over 434,000 members and beneficiaries, is under the oversight of the State Legislature. It has an estimated \$4.5 billion in fossil fuel holdings.

New York's climate law requires net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In addition to the CRF’s commitment to divest from risky coal, oil and gas companies, three of five New York City pensions, including the NYC teachers, are currently divesting \$4 billion from fossil fuels. Governor Cuomo has [directed public authorities](#) with assets valued at over \$40 billion to divest from fossil fuels. Yet the NYS Teachers Retirement System (NYSTRS) has neglected to develop a divestment plan or any type of climate action plan.

Across the world and here in New York State, more than [1,300 institutions with assets over \\$14 trillion](#) including over 300 pension funds and governments have committed to divest from fossil fuels. Both the American Federation of Teachers and NYS United Teachers have passed resolutions in favor of divestment.

###

[The report can be downloaded here](#)

Additional Quotes:

“Coal has been one of the biggest contributors to the climate crisis we are confronting today. Coal's financially lucrative days peaked years ago. Continuing to invest and even increasing investments in the dirtiest fossil fuel is simply unacceptable and must stop now. The fiduciaries of NYSTRS are complicit in contributing to climate catastrophe by choosing to invest New York State's public school teachers' retirement fund in coal. Investing in any other sector besides fossil fuels would yield more money for the pension. NYSTRS must divest from coal now.” - **Barbara Pal, Divest NY Coalition Coordinator, Vice-President of 350NJ-Rockland, Co-Chair of Divest NJ**

“NYSTRS’ investment in coal and other fossil fuels allows these companies to profit from products that are jeopardizing all life on this planet. And, as Divest NY’s coal report shows, these investments represent an unacceptable financial risk to the retired teachers who have entrusted NYSTRS to responsibly invest.

NYSTRS's investment in coal is morally unacceptable and violates its fiduciary responsibility to retired teachers. The Interfaith Climate Justice Community of WNY calls on NYSTRS to follow the lead of NYS Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli who has divested the Common Retirement Fund of its coal holdings on environmental and fiduciary grounds," said **Sister Eileen O'Connor and Roger Cook, ICJC Co-conveners**

"Divestment works — just ask leading [scientists](#), [economists](#), [investors](#), or [fossil fuel companies](#) themselves. Not only is it the prudent financial choice, given the industry's longstanding financial underperformance and future risk. It's the moral imperative, given the immense racial, social, and economic injustice that accompanies a warming world." said **Connor Chung, a student and organizer with Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard.**

"As the climate crisis continues to accelerate, and as fossil fuels become more and more obsolete everyday, divestment is absolutely necessary for the protection of life on earth as well as providing a sustainable future for the youth of today," said **Matt Oill, member of Divest NY and the New York Youth Climate Leaders.**

"As a teacher I am concerned about the future of my students, AND I'm concerned about the financial stability of my retirement fund. If Comptroller DiNapoli believes it is financially irresponsible to invest in fossil fuels why is my pension fund still invested?" said **Lauren Kirkwood, a teacher and Divest NY member.**

"With the state pension fund already showing leadership by divesting from coal and oil sands companies, citing increased risk, it makes no sense for its sister fund, the Teachers fund, to remain invested in these same companies and industries. It's time for the Teachers fund to enter the 21st century and stop invested in the fuels of the 19th century," said **Richard Brooks, Stand.earth's Climate Finance Director.**

"As the world moves away from and replaces coal projects with renewables and banks and insurance companies decide to stop investing and underwriting coal, it seems almost unbelievable that NYSTRS is increasing its holdings in coal. The fiduciaries are betraying their obligation to achieve acceptable risk for their members and retirees. Teachers, demand that your pension divest from coal immediately and oil and gas thereafter. Stranded assets won't fund your retirement!" said **Tina Weishaus, Co-Chair of Divest New Jersey**