The next issue we will discuss is **Environmental Justice**

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, income, or background, in environmental policies, laws, and decision-making. It seeks to ensure that no community bears a disproportionate share of environmental hazards—such as pollution, industrial waste, or lack of clean water—while others enjoy cleaner, healthier environments.

At its core, environmental justice addresses historical inequalities where low-income communities and communities of color have often been disproportionately affected by environmental issues. These communities are more likely to experience:

* Higher exposure to pollution from factories, highways, and waste sites.
* Limited access to clean water, green spaces, and healthy living conditions.
* Greater vulnerability to climate change impacts, such as extreme heat and flooding. To achieve environmental justice, engaging these marginalized communities in decision-making is crucial, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are prioritized. Policy changes must focus on equitable resource distribution and enhancing access to clean air, water, and safe spaces. Collaborative efforts can foster sustainable solutions that benefit everyone.

New York State has implemented several initiatives to promote environmental justice, ensuring that all communities, mainly those historically marginalized, benefit from ecological protections and sustainable development. Key efforts include...strengthening regulations on pollution sources, increasing funding for clean energy projects in low-income neighborhoods, and enhancing public participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, the state has established partnerships with local organizations to address specific community needs and promote equitable access to resources.

NYS initiatives include:

**1. Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ):** The OEJ, operating under the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), addresses environmental concerns affecting low-income and minority communities. It offers grant opportunities, enforces environmental laws, provides guidance, and enhances public participation to ensure equitable environmental decision-making.

**2. Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA):** Enacted in 2019, the CLCPA sets ambitious climate goals, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. A cornerstone of the Act is its commitment to environmental justice, mandating that at least 35% of the program's benefits are directed to disadvantaged communities. This ensures that communities disproportionately affected by pollution receive priority in clean energy investments and job opportunities.

I should also mention that New York City has developed the EJNYC Mapping Tool, which provides detailed information on environmental justice issues across the city. This tool empowers residents with data to advocate for their communities and make informed decisions regarding environmental policies.

**Finally, there are organizations throughout the state that are Community Engagement and Education organizations.** Organizations like WE ACT for Environmental Justice and the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) play pivotal roles in empowering communities. They ensure that people of color and low-income residents participate meaningfully in creating sound and fair environmental health policies. These organizations have been at the forefront of campaigns to advance environmental justice in both city and state initiatives.

Through these initiatives, New York State demonstrates a strong commitment to integrating environmental justice into its policies, ensuring that all residents have access to a healthy and sustainable environment.