From Our Executive Director

After the incredible tumult of last year's pandemic and election, 2021 was supposed to be much calmer. But nothing could be further from the truth. COVID-19 continued to wreak havoc, ongoing disinformation campaigns undermined faith in democracy, the climate crisis is upon us and causing chaos, and here in New York, scandal toppled a governor.

Yet despite all of that – and because of it – NYPIRG continued to fight and win for the public interest.

We battled against the expansion of new fossil fuel infrastructure projects, helped win a ban on the use of toxic fracking fluid as road salt for driving, and were an integral part of the national Make Polluters Pay effort to hold the oil and gas companies responsible for the climate change damages that they caused.

We helped close a loophole that excluded public water systems serving fewer than 10,000 residents from having to test for unregulated contaminants and updated our “What’s in My Water?” web tool. These measures will ensure that all New Yorkers can know about their drinking water quality.

We pressed hard for the overhaul of New York’s much-maligned ethics oversight and voting administration systems, and are continuing to work to replace the state’s fatally flawed ethics rules with a system that is truly independent.

All of this – along with our work on consumer rights, health care, higher education, mass transit, and more – would not be possible without our supporters, volunteers, staff, and partners. To all of you, thank you for making our work possible. The fight continues.

---Blair Horner
Our Mission

The New York Public Interest Research Group Fund (NYPIRG) is a non-partisan, nonprofit, research and public education organization dedicated to enhancing the public voice in critical public policy debates in order to strengthen democracy, enhance the rights of consumers and voters, and protect the environment and public health in New York. Over the past four decades, we have educated hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, recruited thousands of community members from all parts of the state, conducted research, produced studies and reports, and promoted key public interest issues in the media, enhancing NYPIRG’s institutional impact and empowering New Yorkers.
Taking Action on Climate Change

Climate change is the greatest environmental threat facing the planet. The accumulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is causing extreme weather events, harmful algal blooms, ocean acidification, and rising sea levels. If left unabated, this will have devastating impacts on New York’s economy, infrastructure, public health, coastal areas, and natural ecosystems.

NYPIRG’s climate priorities are to ensure New York meets its ambitious and necessary climate goals by:

- moving to 100% renewable energy in all sectors as rapidly as possible;
- electrifying buildings and transportation;
- halting investment in fossil fuel infrastructure such as power plants and oil and gas pipelines;
- holding corporate polluters financially responsible for the damage they have caused; and
- being accountable to New Yorkers about how the state is meeting the strict goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

Victory! New York State denies permits for two critical fossil fuel infrastructure projects – the Danskammer Power Plant in Newburgh and the Astoria Power Plant in Queens – a huge win for New York’s climate and air quality

Victory! New York City bans the use of fossil fuels in new building construction

Victory! New York enacted legislation that will enable the Department of Agriculture to cut pollution from the agriculture sector, which accounts for roughly 10% of the country’s greenhouse gas emissions through soil health practices

Victory! New York agrees to put on the November 2022 ballot a “Restore Mother Nature” bond act designed to provide funding to offset the impacts of climate

Victory! New York expands state program to incentivize electric vehicles and charging stations
Taking Action on Climate Change

NYPIRG has been an integral part of the movement to fight climate change in New York – educating and activating tens of thousands of residents annually, organizing events, engaging the media, and partnering with environmental and community organizations across the state. Examples of our work this year:

- Developed a Climate Scorecard to serve as a blueprint for how the state could maintain progress toward its climate goals. We also called on the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to include clear and accessible public reporting when creating the state’s Climate Action Plan.

- Wrote and released a fact sheet and analysis on the hazards of using oil and gas waste for deicing roads. The New York State Legislature banned the use of toxic fracking fluid as road salt for driving, but the legislation was ultimately vetoed by the Governor.

- Along with dozens of other New York organizations, sent an open letter to the NY Congressional Delegation in support of policies that hold corporate polluters financially responsible for their role in the climate crisis.

- Called for a moratorium on cryptomining, which uses tremendous amounts of energy and would undermine New York’s climate goals.

- Called for an investigation into actions by the DEC leading to the burning of toxic PFAS firefighting foam (AFFF) at the Norlite facility in Cohoes.

- Organized and participated in dozens of media events and rallies across the state that brought together students, residents, and community groups in support of pro-climate policies.

We will continue our vigilant efforts to ensure that the state meets its ambitious climate goals, and helps make New York a leader in combating the greatest threat to our planet.

On October 15, NYPIRG and our partners, NYRenews and NY Youth Climate Leaders, held a very special Zoom event with New York Attorney General Letitia James. Grassroots advocates, climate advocacy partners, and our keynote speaker discussed how to #MakePollutersPay for the environmental and climate destruction that they have caused. This digital assembly of the people, viewed online by over 200 virtual attendees, offered participants the opportunity to learn how we can hold corporate polluters responsible for their actions — through the legal system, through policy, and through organizing.
Spotlight: People Power for A Liveable Future
NYPIRG’s 2021 Virtual Earth Day Celebration

In honor of Earth Day, NYPIRG hosted “People Power for a Liveable Future,” a virtual celebration that brought together hundreds of New Yorkers across the state to discuss the intersection of environmental issues that impact the quality of our present and future lives – from climate change to access to clean air and water, to plastic and solid waste pollution – and the disproportionate impact of these issues on black, brown, and poor communities. At this inspiring event, attendees discussed ways they could build public momentum in support of forward-thinking, sustainable policies that will provide a liveable future for all, and heard a special keynote address from former EPA Region 2 Administrator and President of Beyond Plastics Judith Enck. Below are some of the NYPIRG staff and activists from across the state who spoke at the event along with some of the many attendees.
Safeguarding Drinking Water

Five years ago, NYPIRG launched a new, comprehensive effort to protect and improve drinking water resources in New York. We developed and released “What’s in My Water?”, an online tool to educate New Yorkers about the state of their drinking water, the presence of contaminants found through laboratory testing, and location and nature of some potential threats to local drinking water.

Our work has increased public access to information about drinking water supplies, raised the profile of drinking water issues in New York at the state and federal level, and led to critical improvements and protections for New York’s drinking water supplies.

This year, NYPIRG updated our What’s In My Water site with the most current publicly available information about regulated and unregulated contaminants, and added new information about additional Community Water systems, including those in schools, hospitals, factories. We engaged thousands of residents and stakeholders across the state. Examples of our work:

- Working with community members and groups in Hoosick Falls, Cohoes, Newburgh, Cairo, Rockland County and in the finger lakes regarding emerging contaminants and other emerging threats to water quality and climate, like cryptocurrency mining.

- Helping organize several news conferences and sign-on letters to address emerging contaminant issues and response to PFAS pollution in Rockland County.

- Submitting and soliciting comments to the Department of Environmental Conservation on the Proposed Remedial Action Plan for a new water source for Hoosick Falls.

- Working with environmental and public health groups to successfully fight to halt water shut-offs during the COVID-19 crisis.

Victory! Closed a loophole that excluded public water systems serving fewer than 10,000 residents from having to test for contaminants

Victory! New York finally adopted drinking water standards for PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane – three contaminants that have polluted the drinking water supplies serving millions of New Yorkers

Victory! New York State amended the Emerging Contaminant Monitoring Act to create a list of emerging contaminants for statewide testing and requires the review and creation of a new list every three years

Victory! New York released more stringent testing requirements and standards pertaining to lead in school drinking water

Victory! New York State increased funding for water infrastructure
Addressing the Plastic Pollution Crisis

Plastic pollution is a global problem – creating millions of tons of non-biodegradable plastic waste that pollutes our oceans and natural environments, impacts food chains, and harms wildlife. NYPIRG’s work centered on engaging and activating New Yorkers to build a movement across the state in support of policies that reduce plastic use and remove plastic from the waste stream. We organized a number of virtual community events to educate and engage New Yorkers about the plastic crisis and the need to dramatically reduce plastic waste, and in partnership with Beyond Plastics, hosted a series of community meetings in New York City.

NYPIRG published New Yorkers’ Guide to Fight Plastic Pollution – A Toolkit for Action to arm New Yorkers with: information about plastic pollution; how to reduce plastic consumption individually, regionally, and statewide; and tools and resources for organizing, contacting elected officials, and engaging media.

Victory! New York’s plastic bag ban goes into effect

Victory! New York City mandates that restaurants and other food service establishments stop regular distribution of plastic straws, and instead provide them only upon request

Victory! New York hotels will stop distributing single-use plastic bottles containing shampoo and other hospitality care products by 2025
Empowering Voters and Protecting Democracy

New York has long lagged behind other states in voter registration and voter participation rates. The importance of engaging New Yorkers in our democracy has never been more important. NYPIRG advocated for reforms to make it easier for New Yorkers to register and cast their vote, modernize our voting systems, and remove the influence of dark money in New York State politics. Examples of our work this year:

- Educated and engaged New Yorkers about what was on the ballot and encouraged people to get out the vote for the November 2020 General Election, and June 2021 primaries.
- In partnership with our affiliate organization, developed and promoted educational materials on early voting, absentee ballots, ranked-choice voting, and hosted a voter helpline.
- Was selected as the New York State lead organization for National Voter Registration Day 2021. NYPIRG hosted trainings and helped coordinate voter registration activities among hundreds of groups across the state.
- Called on the New York State Board of Elections to reinstate a public comment period for its Board meetings.
- Through our partnership with the New Your City Complete Count Campaign, engaged residents to complete the 2020 census.

Victory! New York mandates polling sites on or nearby college campuses with over 300 active registered student voters

New Voter Engagement Project

It has been well-established that the key to future voter participation is engagement early in adulthood. NYPIRG New Voter Engagement Project seeks to: (1) Recruit and train students across the state through experiential learning to register and mobilize their peers to vote; (2) Conduct public education efforts about voter policies being considered at the local and national level; and (3) Foster lifelong voting and civic participation habits among young voters.

A key priority is expanding voting access to college students. NYPIRG organized a letter from over 120 student groups calling for poll sites on college campus grounds. We released this letter on the 50th Anniversary of New York’s approval of the 26th Amendment, which gave 18-20 year-olds the right to vote. We followed up with media outreach and local events in support of college polling sites. Our efforts paid off when New York State included a mandate for poll sites on or near college campuses where more than 300 active registered student voters reside in the final 2022 budget.

We also conducted education and public outreach in support of other policies that reduce barriers to voting, like eliminating voter registration deadlines and no excuse absentee voting. We will continue this work to expand voting rights and increase voter participation among young adults in 2022.
Promoting Open and Accountable Government

The incredible scandals and controversies that have rocked the state capital in recent years have provided an opportunity for NYPIRG to research and offer best ethics practices to guide policymakers in their debate over needed reforms. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, NYPIRG continued to be a leading voice in support of government practices that are open, accountable, and that best serve the public.

- Released a letter calling for legislative leaders to hold hearings on the failures of the state’s ethics laws, specifically the need to replace the current Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE), and to assess how New York State can restore public confidence in ethics enforcement. New York State did hold hearings and NYPIRG testified at them.

- Released a letter calling for changes to legislative procedures to improve access and communication in remote public hearings.

- Called for additional funding for state and local Boards of Elections so that they could adequately prepare for the 2020 Presidential Election.

- Called for New York State to use funds from the Stock Transfer Tax to address state funding shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- NYPIRG maintained and updated our “Legislative Profiles” which allow New Yorkers easy access to background information on their state legislators. The profiles list relevant committee assignments, outside income information, the most recent election results, the identity of significant campaign contributors, as well as information about the demographic and partisan makeup of the district’s population.
Protecting Public Health and Fighting for Consumer Rights

Antibiotic Resistance

Victory! New York State requires antibiotic resistance stewardship programs at hospitals and nursing homes, including training regarding antimicrobial resistance and infection prevention and control.

To prevent the rise of antibiotic-resistant “superbugs,” NYPIRG has an ongoing effort to reduce the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in medical, community, and farm settings. We successfully urged that the state mandate infection control stewardship programs in hospitals and nursing homes. In addition, since nearly two-thirds of medically important antibiotics are used on livestock and nearly one-quarter of all antibiotic-resistant infections originate in agricultural settings, NYPIRG joined with nearly 50 national and state health, animal welfare, and consumer organizations to call for a ban on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals for the purposes of disease prevention. Veterinarians should only prescribe antibiotics to those animals that are sick, or in certain circumstances to control the outbreak of disease from a contagious animal(s), or in relation to certain medical procedures. Keep medically important antibiotics working for people!

Small Claims Court Action Centers

Since 1977, NYPIRG has offered help to New Yorkers with consumer problems and complaints, such as the purchase of defective goods, shoddy services, unreturned security deposits, property damage or falling victim to deceptive business practices. For many, New York’s Small Claims Courts – the original “People’s Court” – is the place for them to seek justice. In partnership with our affiliate, NYPIRG counselors across the state provide procedural information to consumers about the small claims court system in New York State via our Small Claims Court Action Centers.

Ensuring Quality, Affordable Public Higher Education is Accessible for All

Victory! NYPIRG’s longstanding efforts to increase state investment in public higher education – in partnership with our student-led affiliate – paid off this year with several significant victories for public college students.

This included the single biggest hike in the maximum award for the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), and a commitment for TAP to fully cover the cost of public college tuition over the next four years. It also included a three-year freeze on public college tuition, stable funding streams for community colleges, and restored or increased funding for numerous opportunity programs and services.

To highlight changes in state investment in public higher education, NYPIRG wrote and released a policy paper on tuition policies for community colleges over the past decade. The report found that, on average, community college tuition increases outstripped inflation and also increased a greater rate that public four-year colleges. The report also found that state investment in community colleges has declined and that the burden of tuition falls disproportionately on students, and called for several reforms to community college tuition policy.

The Case for a Public Bank

NYPIRG is a member of Public Bank NYC, a coalition of more than 40 organizations across the city who support the creation of a public bank. Throughout the year, organizers and volunteers with NYPIRG hosted and participated in a number of news events, virtual rallies, social media action days, stakeholder meetings, educational workshops, and other activities to raise awareness and support for public banking in New York. We submitted and solicited testimony at a New York City public hearing on public banking and, through our work with the coalition, helped organize and participate in a candidate briefing on public banking for all individuals running for New York City office.
Improving Mass Transit Access and Affordability

For the past four decades, NYPIRG’s Straphangers Campaign has been a leader in the fight for safe, affordable, and reliable mass transit in New York City. Our reports, media, advocacy, and public education efforts highlighted the need for a greater investment in transit infrastructure, and for improvements to make the system more accessible to all riders.

The Straphangers Campaign also continued to build support for bus improvements, through our work as a lead member of the Bus Turnaround Coalition. We helped to drive a public narrative that centers on rider experience and the problem of poor bus service by putting riders front and center of media and organizing efforts that included hosting twice-monthly meetings with riders in Queens, organizing “Better Buses” digital days of action, and conducting transit teach-ins. NYPIRG activists participated in news conferences and made numerous appearances on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio.

Victory! 2021 fare increase averted

Victory! New York City commits to 28 miles of bus lanes and busways on city streets

Victory! Main Street busway in Flushing launches
Financial Overview and Contact Information

The following is an overview of NYPIRG's income and expenses.

**Board of Directors**
Jay Halfon, President
Lisa Howard, Treasurer
Chris Meyer, Secretary
Neysa Pranger, Director
Camille Rivera, Director

**Executive Director**
Blair Horner

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