From Our Executive Director

It was an unprecedented year. In March 2020, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic arrived in New York with a vengeance. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers fell ill, hospitals were overwhelmed, and businesses and institutions across the state shut down.

Amid countless obstacles, New Yorkers persevered. At NYPIRG, our staff rallied; adapting our community education and organizing work to fully remote – and we continued to win critical victories for New Yorkers and be a staunch advocate for the public interest. Switching our strategies – and doing so seamlessly – was the result of an incredibly impressive effort by our staff.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our organizing efforts led to a ban on water and utility shutoffs and emergency funding for New York City subways and buses. We made recommendations for how state government should conduct business during the pandemic, and developed and promoted non-partisan resources to help voters vote by absentee ballot in the June primary election.

There were other successes during the year. New York State denied permits for fossil fuel infrastructure, increased protections for drinking water, and banned the use of polystyrene. We released reports and analyses on hospital quality, prescription drugs, public higher education funding, tobacco control, and more. We registered 16,780 voters and engaged New Yorkers across the state to self-respond to the 2020 census.

Year after year, NYPIRG drives public attention to the key issues of the day and has a meaningful, positive impact on policies that affect all New Yorkers. To our supporters, volunteers, staff, and partners – thank you for making our work possible.

---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. New York must move to 100% renewable energy in all sectors as rapidly as possible. Moreover, polluters must be held financially responsible for the damage they have caused.

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.

We submitted a letter calling for the Climate Action Council to set a publicly accessible climate goal dashboard to ensure accountability of the progress the state is making on its ambitious climate goals. We also created and included a draft model that could be used.

NYPIRG has also been active in efforts to halt oil and gas infrastructure development – including the E37/Albany Loop Pipeline, the Danskammer repowering proposal, the Astoria power plant proposal, and the North Brooklyn Pipeline – organizing community events and soliciting thousands of comments and petition signatures from the public in opposition to fossil fuel infrastructure.

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

Victory! New York State denies permits for the proposed Williams Pipeline, rejecting investment into fossil fuel infrastructure.

Victory! New York State closes a loophole so that moving forward, fracking waste will be classified and treated as hazardous waste.

Climate Strike
NYPIRG recruited hundreds of students and residents to participate in the September 2019 Climate Strike – a worldwide effort that brought together millions of people from across the globe to demand climate actions from world leaders.

Earth Day Rally
NYPIRG organized a virtual Earth Day rally with nearly 200 participants that was livestreamed on our website and other social media platforms. Participants received updates on New York State climate policies from guest speakers including State Senator Liz Krueger and participated in actions in support of renewable and sustainable energy.
Safeguarding Drinking Water

Four 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 the 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 engaged tens of thousands of residents and stakeholders across the state. We partnered with community groups in Hoosick Falls, Cohoes, Newburgh, Cairo, and the Finger Lakes regarding emerging contaminants, and hosted dozens of presentations and outreach events at community gatherings. We solicited and submitted over 2,000 postcards from residents, published op-eds in the media, and testified at public hearings in support of increased drinking water regulations.

Victory! Nearly five years after the drinking water contamination crisis in Hoosick Falls came to light, the New York State Department of Health begins to regulate emerging contaminants that have polluted the water supplies serving millions of New Yorkers – including Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA), Perfluorooctanoic Sulfonate (PFOS), and 1,4-dioxane.

Victory! New York bans water shutoffs during the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring that residents have access to clean water.

Victory! New York phases out Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAs) firefighting foam, protecting water supplies from runoff from these toxic chemicals.

Victory! New York increases funding to upgrade and improve the state’s aging drinking 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.

- In partnership with Beyond Plastics, we organized and hosted more than two dozen community presentations and strategy sessions across the state – including a virtual event on April 23 during Earth Week and a virtual town hall on June 18.
- We delivered a series of presentations to policymakers and local governments in upstate New York about plastic pollution and various actions and policies to help residents and businesses change habits to create less plastic waste.
- NYPIRG submitted and delivered testimony at local and statewide public hearings on issues related to reducing plastic waste.
- We co-authored a joint letter on plastic bag regulations calling for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to close a loophole in the law banning plastic bags that would allow thicker plastic bags to be used by stores.

Victory! New York State adopts the nation’s strongest statewide ban of single-use polystyrene food containers and the sale of polystyrene loose fill packaging materials – or packing peanuts.
Protecting Public Health

From helping New Yorkers protect themselves from skyrocketing drug prices and toxic chemicals, to advocating for patient rights, to ensuring accessibility to high quality and affordable medical care, NYPIRG produced reports and advocated on a broad range of topics to protect public health.

COVID-19 and New York State’s Review of Hospitals and Nursing Homes
As lawmakers reviewed the Cuomo Administration’s oversight of nursing homes during the pandemic, NYPIRG issued a letter containing our analysis that reviewed the NYS Health Department’s actions against nursing homes and hospitals.

NYPIRG, along with New Yorkers for Patient and Family-Centered Empowerment and the Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care (IPFCC) released the fourth in a series of reports examining hospital policies on family and visitor presence, which have been found lacking. In this report, IPFCC provided training programs to help hospitals reexamine and improve their practices. Our analysis in this report examines whether this intervention helped change hospitals’ policies and practices. The findings showed that there were varying degrees of improvements in many hospitals visitors’ policies during the past year, most notably in hospitals that participated in a training program.

Code Blue: New York Hospitals’ Poor Quality Performance
NYPIRG released a report detailing the poor quality ratings of New York hospitals compared to the rest of the country. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, New York hospitals overall had the lowest quality in the nation. NYPIRG called on New York State to investigate poor performance of hospitals and to make quality improvements a priority in the coming year.
Shop Smart or Pay More: A Guide to Prescription Drug Pricing in New York
This guide documents the price differences for the five widely available brand name drugs for diabetes, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) found in the New York State Department of Health’s database. The review showed surprisingly large ranges in the retail prices of drugs within geographic regions, underscoring the financial threat posed to residents who lack prescription drug coverage. The report also found that the state’s website could use a considerable amount of modernization, but in particular, the number of drugs listed could be expanded. The state collects retail prices for hundreds (if not thousands) of drugs; the state should post them all.

Falling Short: New York’s Tobacco Control Program and the Need for More Support
This report reviews the science behind tobacco control, the recommendations of the nation’s experts on how to run a pro-health tobacco control program, and the new threats posed by vaping and flavored tobacco products. In addition, the report examines the responsibilities of the Tobacco Control Program (TCP) and shows how, despite massive available revenues, New York has starved its health efforts and the TCP is now falling short.

Chain Reaction V: How Top Restaurants Rate on Reducing Antibiotic Use in Their Beef Supplies
Released with U.S. PIRG and other environmental and consumer groups, this report highlights the use of antibiotics in fast food beef supplies. The report found that too many fast food chains are still purchasing meat that is routinely treated with antibiotics – contributing to the global health crisis caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
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.

- We released recommendations with other good government groups for how New York State government can and should conduct business in an open and accountable way during the COVID-19 pandemic, and closely monitored state actions as the pandemic continued through 2020.

- We called for New York State to use funds from the Stock Transfer Tax to help address the budget shortfalls in the state budget caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

- We called for an appropriate review and limitations on the emergency powers granted to the executive and for the legislature to reconvene for session during the summer.

- 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.
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, in partnership with our affiliate organization, conducted a large-scale, non-partisan voter registration campaign in communities across New York State that registered 16,780 voters.

NYPIRG advocated for reforms to make it as easy as possible 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.

In coalition, we released a letter to the Public Campaign Financing Commission with several recommendations for crafting a public financing system for elections.

We released an in-depth analysis featuring data on early-voting sites across New York State during the November 2019 election, and calling for expanded access to early voting sites in future elections.

We educated and engaged New Yorkers about what was on the ballot and encouraged people to get out the vote for the September 2019 primaries, November 2019 General Election, and June 2020 presidential primaries.

We promoted NYPIRG’s Rock the Absentee Ballot educational campaign to encourage social distancing and COVID exposure risk reduction.

Capital Inve$tments: A Look at the 2018 New York State Legislative Elections
NYPIRG released this report that analyzes how New York State elections are financed and makes recommendations to the Commission that is currently reviewing New York State’s system of campaign financing.
Getting Out the Count – The 2020 Census

NYPIRG’s 2020 Census Complete Count Campaign worked to ensure that all New Yorkers were counted in the 2020 Census. From Western and Central New York, to the Hudson Valley, to Long Island, we engaged residents and students through one-on-one outreach, local events, community presentations, and the media. In the five boroughs, NYPIRG was a proud partner of the New York City Complete Count Fund, coordinating our Get Out the Count efforts with the City and over 150 community organizations.

There were unique challenges to engaging residents to respond to the census. Many people had concerns about the security of their personal information – an issue of particularly concern for New York’s large immigrant populations. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly hindered in-person census outreach and survey collection. Despite these challenges, NYPIRG’s census team engaged hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers about the importance of the census.

- We collected over 15,000 pledge cards from New York City residents, committing to self-respond to the 2020 Census.

- We hosted in-person and online presentations to high school students to educate them about the census and let them know how they can help New York get out the count. We also participated in and provided speakers for community events, including an event hosted by the Village of New Paltz, and a teen census panel hosted by the Brooklyn Public Library.

- NYPIRG called, emailed, and texted tens of thousands of New Yorkers to self-respond to the 2020 Census, including participating in predictive dialer phone banking actions targeting residents who live in communities with low self-response rates.

Victory! – Engaged over 200,000 New Yorkers about why the decennial census matters, and secured over 15,000 self-responses to the 2020 Census.

Field staff from NYPIRG’s Complete Count Project spoke with New Yorkers in subway stations and other transit hubs across the city about the 2020 Census, collecting census “pledge cards.”
Fighting for Consumers

Price Gouging During the Pandemic
NYPIRG advocated for broader powers for the New York State Attorney General to deter price gouging for essential supplies during the COVID-19 outbreak – such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant, medical gloves, and surgical masks.

Freedom of Information – the Repeal of 50-a
NYPIRG released a statement with other good government groups in support of the repeal of Section 50-a of the Civil Rights Law and modification of the Public Officers Law so that disciplinary records of police, fire, and corrections officers are subject to public disclosure via a Freedom of Information request in the same manner as other public officials.

The Case for a Public Bank
As part of the Public Bank NYC coalition, NYPIRG organized and participated in a virtual town hall, From Crisis to Recovery: NY’s Fight for Public Banking to discuss the merits of creating a public bank in New York City, and collected petition signatures in support of statewide public banking policies.

The Right to Repair
NYPIRG promoted “Right to Repair” reforms, which would require manufacturers to make parts and service information available to consumers. To highlight this important issue, NYPIRG released “What are New Yorkers Fixing” with U. S. PIRG, a report highlighting devices that that consumers tried to fix by visiting ifixit.com.

Higher Education and Its Eroding Affordability Over the Decade 2010-19
This policy paper examines the ten-year trend in tuition, financial aid, and other college affordability measures in New York’s higher educational institutions. It reveals a continuing shift in the cost of attending public college from the state to the college students and their families. In addition, freezing the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award limits financial aid to students at independent colleges and universities. New York State must reject hikes in the costs of attending public colleges and modernize and expand funding to TAP, as well as take other steps to improve college affordability.

Smarter Shopping for Toys
NYPIRG released the 34th Annual Trouble in Toyland Report with U.S. PIRG, which identifies toys that potentially pose hazards to children, and provides smart shopping tips for parents and other consumers shopping for children.

Small Claims Court Action Centers
In partnership with our affiliate, we provided information to consumers about the small claims court system in New York State and offered free procedural advice via our Small Claims Court Action Centers. NYPIRG set up and publicized a toll-free number – (800) 566-5020 – to facilitate small claims court counseling during the COVID pandemic.
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 better and more reliable service for New York City’s bus and subway riders.

Public Transit and COVID-19

Like everything else, the New York City subway and bus system was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Subway service was shut down overnight for cleaning, and ridership plummeted to a fraction of normal levels as commuters and travelers stayed home. At the same time, the vital role of the city’s public transit system was never more apparent – needed by medical professionals, grocery store employees, delivery people, and other essential workers. The Straphangers Campaign was at the forefront of efforts to fight for recovery funding for the transit system, and ensure that it continues to meet the needs of New York City residents.

As part of the Bus Turnaround Coalition, we released a letter calling for New York City to create an additional 40 miles of dedicated bus lanes to help expand and create safer mass transit options for riders and transit workers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign Director Jaqi Cohen was selected to serve on Mayor de Blasio’s Surface Transportation Advisory Council. Our specific focus was helping the city identify the right, most equitable priorities for its recovery plans, with special attention to the needs of bus riders.

We successfully advocated for MTA emergency federal funding due to significant revenue shortfalls as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, and for additional, critically needed funds at the state level.

Bus Service Improvements

The Straphangers Campaign continued our work as a key member of the Bus Turnaround Coalition, including meeting regularly with the coalition to strategize organizing tactics, producing recommendations for city and state transit agencies to modernize and improve New York City’s bus system, and garnering press coverage of our work.

Cozy Awards

The Straphangers Campaign, along with TransitCenter and Tri-State Transportation Campaign released the 2019 Cozy Awards – highlighting the prevalence of bus stops across the city that are spaced too close together, slowing down bus service. The report also makes recommendations for the MTA to reevaluate bus stop locations, and to improve sidewalk conditions, address street safety concerns, and survey accessibility at bus stops.
Financial Overview and Contact Information

The following is an overview of NYPIRG’s income and expenses for the fiscal year ending August 31, 2020.

Sources of Income

- Contributions and Grants: 89%
- Consumer Cooperative: 9%
- Interest and Other Income: 2%

Expenses

- Program Expenses: 83%
- Fundraising: 7%
- Management & General Expenses: 10%

Board of Directors

- Jay Halfon, President
- Lisa Howard, Treasurer
- Chris Meyer, Secretary
- Neysa Pranger, Director
- Camille Rivera, Director

Executive Director

- Blair Horner

Contact Us

New York Public Interest Research Group Fund, Inc. (NYPIRG)
9 Murray Street, Lower Level
New York, NY 10007
Phone: (212) 349-6460
www.nypirg.org
facebook.com/nypirg
twitter.com/nypirg