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# ROOTED IN JUSTICE:

An Environmental Agenda  
from Asian Americans  
in Pennsylvania

June 2025



# Contents

Introduction	4
Key Takeaways & Policy Recommendations	5-6
Demographic Overview	7
Home & Neighborhood	11
Home Improvement Programs	14
Neighborhood Improvement Programs	16
Public Transit	18
Laws & Government	20
Community Voices	22
Environmental Justice Snapshots	30
Looking Forward	32
About AACFPA & Acknowledgements	33

# Introduction

**We present this report in chaotic, unprecedented times.** Between the economic pressures of rising inflation and the threat to lives and safety from aggressive deportations, detainments, and other immigration enforcement activities impacting many in our communities, we asked ourselves more than once during this process if it was the right time for a report like this. But we know that chaos is the point and we cannot always be on the defensive. As we organize to defend our communities, we must also plan ahead and plant the seeds for the brighter future we fight for. We know that we keep ourselves safe.

We also know that the climate crisis is a direct result of the current economic system of haves and have nots, where the needs of our communities are sacrificed for the profits of billionaires. The same forces responsible for economic inequality and the criminalization of immigration are deeply linked to the drivers of climate injustice. Those least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions feel the brunt of its impacts harder and with fewer resources to clean up. Climate and environmental justice touch every issue we fight: housing, education, mental health access, and immigration. Many in the Asian diaspora experienced the environmental harms from war, economic exploitation, and degradation of our home countries. We will only see more climate refugees as the Global South continues to be impacted by the increasing existential threats of the climate crisis.

There is a story told about Asian Americans. The model minority myth tells the false story of a politically disengaged, inactive community that runs counter to the historic origins of "Asian America" as a political identity and erases the invaluable role of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Environmental Justice movement. We know this story is wrong.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are more likely than the general U.S. population, 84% compared to 74%, to agree that climate change exists based on a 2024 poll<sup>1</sup>. The same poll found that 75% of AAPI adults say that human activity is the cause of climate change compared to 61% of U.S. adults overall. Polling also shows that AAPI adults prioritize environmental protection over economic growth (75%), and believe that the U.S. government (73%) and other Global North countries (71%) have a "significant responsibility" to combat climate change. A 2022 poll<sup>2</sup> showed that 69% of AAPI adults agreed that the President and Congress should "pass stronger legislation to reduce the effects of climate change."

Research shows that Asian Americans experience disproportionately higher exposure to dangerous air pollutants, including 73% more exposure than white counterparts in the Mid-Atlantic<sup>3</sup>. Asian Americans have "significantly higher exposure than other ethnic or racial groups to PFAS, a family of thousands of synthetic chemicals also known as "toxic forever" chemicals."<sup>4</sup> Our exposures are directly linked to racist policies of redlining and other acts of housing and job discrimination that forced our communities into areas and occupations with these higher risks.

This is all to say that we are telling a different story. A story that doesn't question the facts of climate science, and instead calls for what has kept us going: the strength of our communities, a desire for green spaces and homes to call our own, and the knowledge that while we didn't cause these problems, we sure as hell can be the solutions.

Our communities have incredible resilience. Uplifting those voices for environmental and climate justice, in an increasingly unpredictable and hostile political atmosphere, could not be more relevant in these times.

<sup>1</sup> "Most within AAPI communities are concerned about climate change and support policies designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," AAPI Data/AP-NORC Poll, 17 April 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Horn-Muller and Chen, "Asian Americans left out of climate movement," Axios, 7 May 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Pinto de Moura, Maria Cecilia and David Reichmuth, "Inequitable Exposure to Air Pollution from Vehicles in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Fact Sheet." Union of Concerned Scientists

<sup>4</sup> "Mount Sinai Researchers Find Asian Americans to Have Significantly Higher Exposure to "Toxic Forever" Chemicals." Mount Sinai Press Release. 24 August 2023

# Key Takeaways & Policy Recommendations



-  An overwhelming demand for green spaces. When participants were asked what they wanted more of in their neighborhoods, the top three responses were:



MORE TREES

(65.64%)



COMMUNITY GARDENS

(60.51%)



PUBLIC PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

(58.97%)

-  A strong call for our elected officials to do more:

- **89.98%** of respondents supported or strongly supported stronger penalties for companies that pollute and harm communities
  - **83.06%** of respondents strongly supported strong laws to protect the environment and limit pollution
  - **82.32%** of respondents agreed that state and local governments should make home efficiency upgrades that protect the environment and help people save money on their bills easier to afford
  - **73.99%** of respondents were unaware of home efficiency programs to help with home repairs and energy bills, including the Whole Home Repairs Program
  - **95.60%** of respondents said they were more likely to vote for a candidate with strong environmental positions, including 68.13% who strongly agreed with the prompt
  - **68.13%** who strongly agreed

-  An emphasis on the value of community:

- **33.73%** of respondents said that community was what they liked most about where they live
  - Respondents told stories about the small acts of care they took for their neighbors: putting out trash cans for the public to use, gifting seeds, and organizing neighborhood cleanups
  - In addition to more green spaces, respondents wanted their neighborhoods taken care of with improved infrastructure for walking and biking around safely, playgrounds for kids to play, and solutions for litter

# Policy Recommendations



Statewide and municipal commitments to equitable decarbonization by 2050

Pass enabling legislation for community solar, Solar for All, and Solar for Schools programs

Maximize funding for energy rebate and home efficiency upgrade programs, with strategic outreach in environmental justice communities

- Ensure equitable implementation of the Penn Energy Savers program
- Work with community partners to provide outreach of programs in select neighborhoods with in-language material and/or interpretation

Increase funding for SEPTA and Pittsburgh Regional Transit systems

Increase funding to improve sidewalks, lighting, protected bike lanes, public trash cans, and regular trash pickup and street cleaning programs

Protection for existing community gardens and urban farms, including easier paths to ownership, and passage of legislation to make it easier for communities to start new ones

Tree planting and other community greening initiatives in neighborhoods with a low tree canopy

- Pass legislation to protect existing trees from harmful development practices

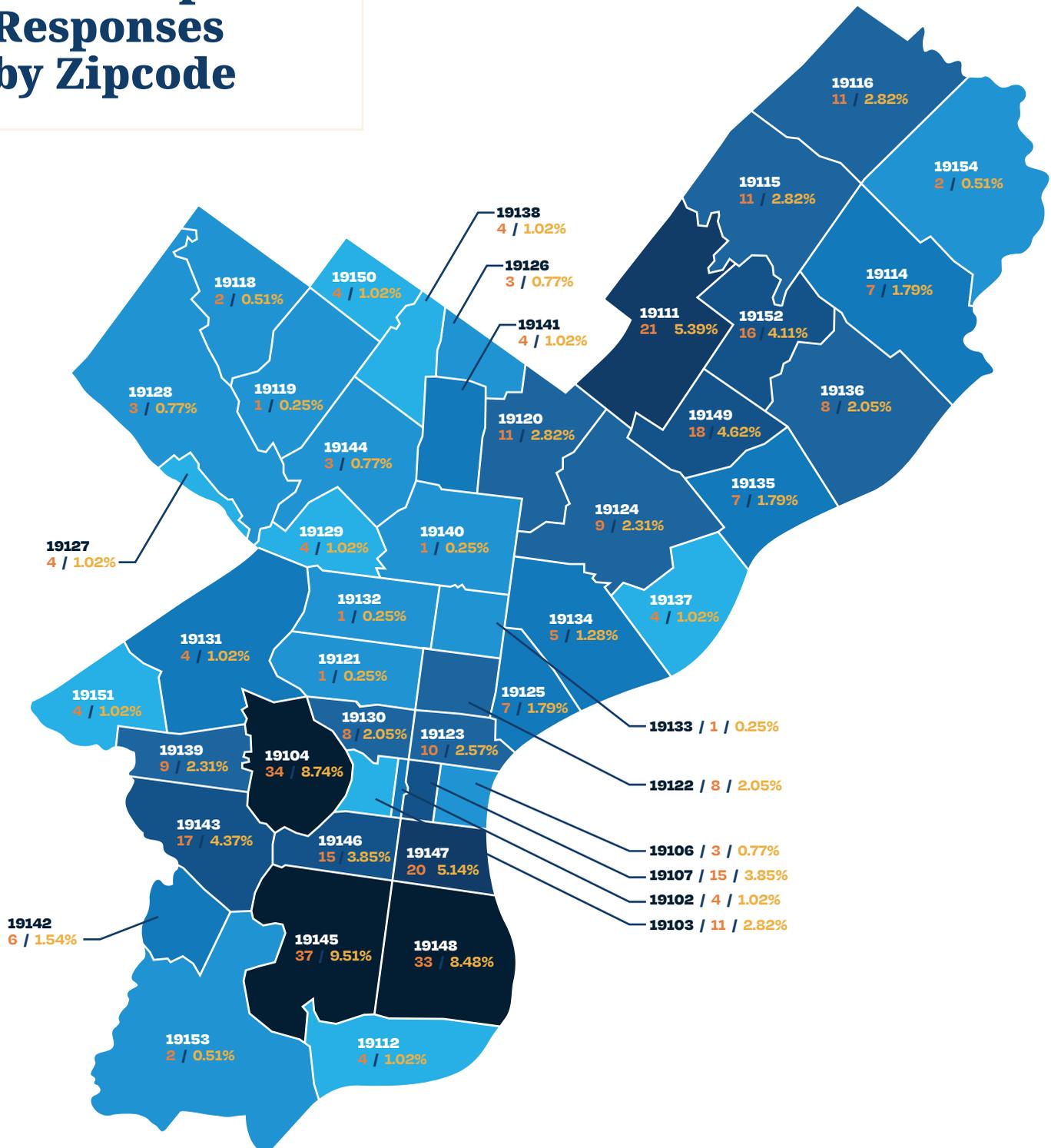
Stronger regulations to protect air and water quality

Stronger penalties for companies that pollute air, water, or other resources

Adopt policies to prevent displacement of low-income residents and preserve cultural heritage with new development and investment in neighborhoods



# Philadelphia Responses by Zipcode





**LIST OF RESPONSES BY AGE**

<b>18 or under</b>	14	1.49%
<b>19-29</b>	185	19.72%
<b>30-39</b>	221	23.56%
<b>40-49</b>	169	18.01%
<b>50-59</b>	143	15.25%
<b>60-69</b>	108	11.51%
<b>70-79</b>	62	6.60%
<b>80+</b>	36	3.83%
<b>Total: 938</b>		



**LIST OF RESPONSES BY ETHNICITY**

<b>Chinese</b>	223	33.83%
<b>Indian</b>	107	26.23%
<b>Korean</b>	77	11.68%
<b>Vietnamese</b>	57	8.64%
<b>Indonesian</b>	34	5.15%
<b>Bangladeshi</b>	26	3.94%
<b>Taiwanese</b>	25	3.79%
<b>Khmer/Cambodian</b>	22	3.33%
<b>Pakistani</b>	20	3.03%
<b>Japanese</b>	16	2.42%
<b>Filipino</b>	11	1.66%
<b>Non-Asian</b>	11	1.66%
<b>Arabic</b>	4	0.60%
<b>Burmese</b>	4	0.60%
<b>Palestinian</b>	3	0.45%
<b>Persian</b>	3	0.45%
<b>Sri Lankan</b>	3	0.45%
<b>Bhutanese</b>	2	0.30%
<b>Laotian</b>	2	0.30%
<b>Malay/Malaysian</b>	2	0.30%
<b>Mongolian</b>	2	0.30%
<b>Thai</b>	2	0.30%
<b>Jordanian</b>	1	0.15%
<b>Karen</b>	1	0.15%
<b>Turkish</b>	1	0.15%
<b>Total: 659</b>		



**LIST OF RESPONSES BY GENDER**

<b>Female</b>	432	46.80%
<b>Male</b>	478	51.78%
<b>Nonbinary/Gender Nonconforming</b>	11	1.19%
<b>Other</b>	2	0.21%
<b>Total: 923</b>		

\*Note: Respondents were able to select multiple options. All "non-Asian" respondents also selected at least one other option.



### LIST OF RESPONSES BY LANGUAGE

### NON-ENGLISH RESPONSES

<b>Arabic</b>	1	0.10%	0.58%
<b>Bengali</b>	8	0.86%	4.70%
<b>Chinese, Simplified (online)</b>	4	0.43%	2.35%
<b>Chinese: Cantonese (phone)</b>	20	2.16%	11.76%
<b>Chinese: Mandarin (phone)</b>	47	5.08%	27.64%
<b>English</b>	755	81.62%	n/a
<b>Hindi</b>	6	0.64%	3.52%
<b>Indonesian</b>	23	2.48%	13.52%
<b>Khmer</b>	1	0.10%	0.58%
<b>Korean</b>	19	2.05%	11.17%
<b>Urdu</b>	1	0.10%	0.58%
<b>Vietnamese</b>	40	4.32%	23.52%
<b>Total: 925</b>			<b>Total: 170</b>

Responses were recorded in twelve languages.

# Home & Neighborhood

The importance of community is a constant theme we see in the results. Community (33.73%) and a feeling of safety (19.37%) were the top two responses when respondents were asked what they liked about where they lived. This is especially meaningful in the current time of growing right-wing extremism, the criminalization of immigration, the increasingly hostile Otherization of Asians and Asian Americans, and the constant threat of gentrification to our communities, and shows the need to protect the integrity of our historical and cultural neighborhoods. Participants talked about the small actions they take to look out for one another. One woman mentioned putting a trash can in front of her house, another woman gives seeds to her friends and neighbors, and Indonesian neighbors in South Philly talked about organizing regular street clean-ups. Respondents talked about taking care of the environment as part of community care.

## WHAT ARE THINGS YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Neighbors / Community	249	33.73%
Good Schools	89	12.05%
Clean / Kept Up	57	7.72%
Easy to Get Around	109	14.76%
Feels Safe	143	19.37%
Green Spaces	33	4.47%
Economic Opportunity	29	3.92%
Nothing	29	3.92%

**Total: 738**



**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING NEGATIVELY IMPACTS WHERE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY LIVE AND WORK?**

Poor Air Quality	95	53.07%
Poor Water Quality	51	28.49%
Trash/Litter	145	81.01%
Power Plants	24	13.41%
Gas Pipelines	34	18.99%
Extreme Heat	75	41.09%
Flooding	36	20.11%
Toxic Waste	20	11.17%

Total: 179

**I FEEL KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS WHERE I LIVE AND WORK. FOR EXAMPLE, CONCERNS ABOUT AIR QUALITY, WATER QUALITY, TOXIC WASTE, ETC.**

Strongly Agree	36	18.27%
Agree	70	35.53%
Neutral	50	25.38%
Disagree	36	18.27%
Strongly Disagree	5	2.54%

Total: 197

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

Trees That Provide Shade	128	65.64%
Public Parks and Playgrounds	115	58.97%
Trash Cans	109	55.90%
Community Gardens	118	60.51%
Public Pools	44	22.56%
Better Public Transit Access	104	53.33%
Improved Walkability	106	54.36%
Grocery Stores in Walking Distance	77	39.49%

Total: 195

**MY NEIGHBORHOOD HAS BEEN DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY UNPREDICTABLE OR EXTREME WEATHER SUCH AS HEAT WAVES, COLD SNAPS, OR FLOODING.**

Yes	187	23.05%
No	529	65.22%
Not Sure	95	11.71%

Total: 811

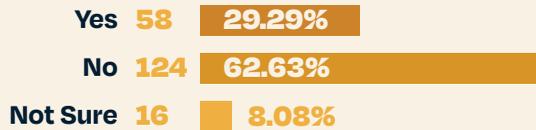
**I KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR HELP OR INFORMATION IF THERE IS A DISASTER OR EXTREME WEATHER EVENT.**

Yes	353	45.02%
No	284	36.22%
Not Sure	147	18.75%

Total: 784

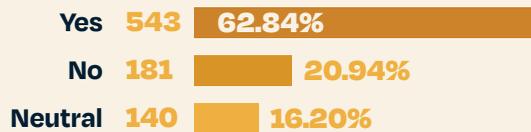
## Community Voices:

**I, OR MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY, HAVE ASTHMA, COPD (CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE), OR OTHER RESPIRATORY ISSUES.**



Total: 198

**MY NEIGHBORHOOD HAS CLEAN AIR.**



Total: 864

**I HAVE RELIABLE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER.**



Total: 839



**"My asthma is worse since moving here, asthma attacks are triggered more often."**

- Nonbinary/GNC Filipino, Allegheny County



**"It's hotter, more unpredictable, more extreme."**

- Indonesian man, Philadelphia



**"It feels like the city doesn't want us to walk."**

- Bengali woman, Allegheny County



**"It feels different in the park, you can feel peace."**

- Bengali man, Allegheny County



**"Reduce plastic waste, stop new developments for higher end housing - provide really affordable housing and repurpose/adapts/repair older buildings rather than demolish them."**

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



**"I live near a major train line. The kind that ship LNG and toxic chemicals like the trains that blew up in [East] Palestine, [Ohio]. It's scary."**

- Korean and Non-Asian woman, Montgomery County



**"There's an asbestos pile!"**

- Korean woman, Montgomery County



**"Lead pipes in our neighborhood and landlords ignoring it."**

- Arab and Chinese woman, Allegheny County



**"For toxic waste and trash to be removed, and keeping trees that provide shade."**

- Khmer/Cambodian woman, Philadelphia

# Home Improvement Programs



Respondents were largely unaware of home repair and other energy efficiency programs available to them.

**A majority of renters either didn't know (47.89%) or weren't sure (12.63%) about protections they were entitled to that protect their rent if they took part in these programs.**

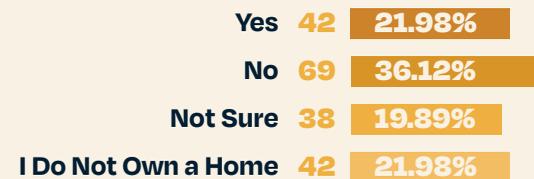
Participants voiced awareness that their energy bills will only increase as temperatures become more extreme, with some saying they were already seeing the changes. Despite being the second-highest natural gas producing state and the third highest oil producer, Pennsylvania is one of the most energy-burdened states, particularly BIPOC communities. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh are two of the highest energy-burdened cities in the country. Pennsylvania also has some of the oldest housing stock in the country. Home upgrades improve energy efficiency, saving money on bills, improving indoor air quality, and home safety.

 **I HAVE HEARD OF THE WHOLE HOME REPAIRS PROGRAM.**



Total: 769

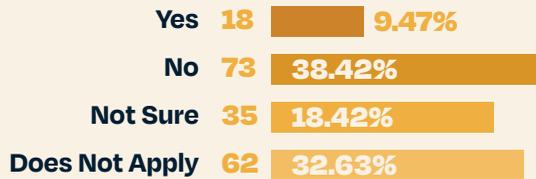
 **I AM AWARE OF HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS TO LOWER MY BILLS AND SAVE ENERGY.**



Total: 191

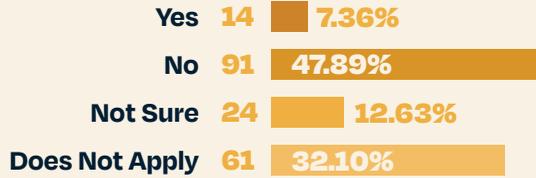
## Community Voices:

 I AM AWARE OF HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS THAT MY LANDLORD CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TO LOWER MY ENERGY BILLS.



Total: 190

 I AM AWARE OF REGULATIONS THAT PREVENT MY LANDLORD FROM RAISING RENT IF THEY PARTICIPATE IN CERTAIN UPGRADE PROGRAMS.



Total: 190

 STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO AFFORD ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY HOME UPGRADES.



Total: 696



"I'm worried that Philadelphia is increasingly becoming a city that is poorly developed and inhospitable. We need more affordable housing and more checks on the greed of developers."

- Chinese Nonbinary/GNC, Philadelphia



"Investment in programs that make solar panel affordable for homeowners."

- Chinese woman, Lehigh County



"Solar or other alternative energy. Energy improvement of homes."

- Japanese woman, Philadelphia



"Solar panel access for lower income households."

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



"Supplemental rebates for heat pump technology. Also, better solar rebates."

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



"People can buy affordable housing regardless of status."

- Indonesian woman, Philadelphia

# Neighborhood Improvement Programs

It's important to note that community solar is currently unable to be implemented in Pennsylvania, though legislation is regularly introduced in the General Assembly to enable such programs. Responses also touched on needs to address gun violence, provide more services for the unhoused, provide affordable housing, access to preventative healthcare, and a desire to have more multilingual street signs. One respondent highlighted the need for more available public cooling centers, which is an equity issue in high energy-burdened neighborhoods<sup>5</sup> and for residents who can't afford air conditioning.

 **COMMUNITY SOLAR LETS PEOPLE GET SOLAR-POWERED ENERGY THROUGH A SUBSCRIPTION MODEL. THIS LETS PEOPLE WHO RENT OR CAN'T HAVE SOLAR PANELS ON THEIR HOMES GET SOLAR ENERGY. SOLAR ENERGY IS CHEAP TO PRODUCE, CLEANER FOR THE AIR, AND CAN HELP LOWER YOUR BILLS. I WOULD SUPPORT A COMMUNITY SOLAR PROGRAM IN MY COMMUNITY.**

Yes	510	70.63%
No	64	8.86%
Neutral/Maybe	148	20.49%

Total: 722



<sup>5</sup> Energy burden is the percentage of a household's income spent on utility bills. Lower-income households have significantly higher energy burdens than median households.

 STATES AND CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING PHILADELPHIA AND PITTSBURGH, ARE BANNING SINGLE-USE PLASTIC SUCH AS BAGS AND UTENSILS. SINGLE-USE PLASTICS ARE A MAJOR SOURCE OF LITTER THAT TAKE HUNDREDS OF YEARS TO BREAK DOWN, CLOG SEWERS, AND POLLUTE WATERWAYS. I WOULD SUPPORT A PLASTIC BAN IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD.

Yes	561	77.70%
No	58	8.03%
Neutral/Maybe	103	14.26%

Total: 722

## Community Voices:



**"Renewable Energy Infrastructure and Green Buildings and Eco-Friendly Housing."**

- Palestinian and Jordanian woman, Philadelphia



**"I would like to see less litter and dumping around Philadelphia. I would like investments in green spaces for everyone."**

- Laotian and non-Asian woman, Philadelphia



**"I would like to see better recycling options available. Right now we can no longer recycle glass in our city. I literally save my glass and take it to my father in law's to put in his recycling."**

- Chinese and Indonesian woman, Dauphin County



**"Composting programs funded by the city."**

- Korean man, Philadelphia



**"Solar power that's accessible."**

- Indonesian woman, Montgomery County



**"More solar! More community donation centers/ less buying brand new for some things"**

- Indian woman, Philadelphia



**"Better recycling programs, bulk refill buying options, fines for littering."**

- Korean woman, Philadelphia



**"Refilleries."**

- Chinese, Indonesian, and Vietnamese woman, Allegheny County<sup>6</sup>



**"Community-owned and controlled green energy sources; investment in Indigenous land stewardship practices; more local community farms."**

- Japanese and Non-Asian woman, Philadelphia



**"Renewable energy generation, public parks, trash cleanup programs, assistance for the homeless/ shelters, maintenance of public transit."**

- Chinese, Mongolian, and Non-Asian woman, Philadelphia



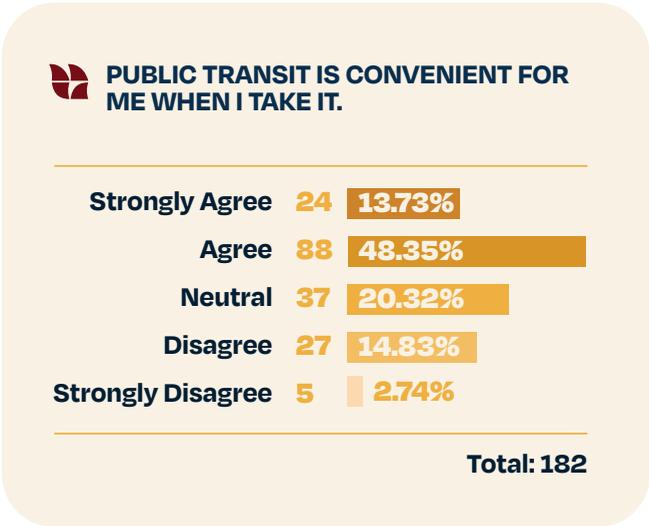
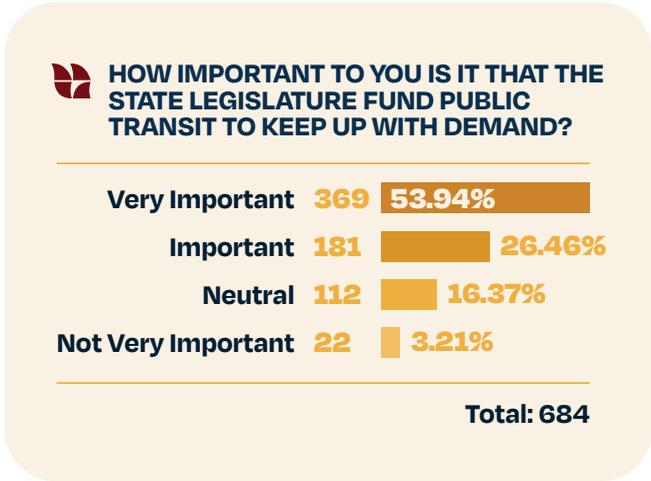
**"I hope to see safety guarantees for pipelines delivering drinking water, more greenery and community parks, timely cleaning of street waste, more parking spaces on the streets, more public transportation, less street noise, and less car exhaust pollution in my community."**

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia

<sup>6</sup> A refillery is a type of store where you can get certain goods repeatedly using the same reusable containers. This cuts down on plastic packaging waste and emissions from online shopping. They are primarily for dry goods and household items and are an example of a circular economy that promotes reuse and locally-based shopping.

# Public Transit

**79.40% of all responses agreed that it was important or very important for the state legislature to fund public transit.** 27.45% of those responses came from the four collar counties surrounding Philadelphia: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery. In Allegheny County, 44.70% of responses said funding public transit was important or very important. Responses also called for improved infrastructure for transit, and to promote safer walkability and biking.



## Community Voices:



**"There's too much focus on cars."**  
- Filipino woman, Allegheny County



**"Enforcement of traffic laws to make cycling and walking safer from car crashes. Stronger enforcement of safety inspections and fines for violations for energy businesses and logistics (trains, ships, and trucks) who have spills."**  
- Korean Nonbinary/GNC, Philadelphia



**"Stronger public transportation, especially for those who do not afford a car!"**  
- Chinese and Laotian woman, Philadelphia



**"Increased public transit frequency and span of service!"**  
- Chinese and Taiwanese man, Allegheny County



**"Much more funding to SEPTA and biking infrastructure, caps over highways (e.g. as planned for Chinatown and Penn's Landing) or putting highways crossing the city underground (like Boston's Big Dig) to improve walkability and create green space!"**  
- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



**"More pedestrian and bicycle paths to public transit!"**  
- Chinese woman, Delaware County



**"Improve bike safety so there are other ways to commute other than cars. Public transit safety can be improved."**  
- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



**"I am really concerned about the SEPTA budget cuts and line cuts. Regional Rail lines like Paoli/Thorndale are crucial for me to get into the city!"**  
- Chinese woman, Montgomery County



# Laws & Government



Multiple participants spoke of a strong desire for local governments and elected officials to do more and take more proactive action to protect the environment. Respondents in the listening sessions spoke about feeling unheard by elected officials and that sustainable programs did not feel like a priority.

**One respondent remarked the lack of sidewalks made it seem that, “the city doesn’t want us to walk”**

*(Listening Session, Pittsburgh. 26 April 2025).*

Responses called for more accountability for politicians, and more consequences for polluters.

 **I SUPPORT STRONG LAWS THAT PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND LIMIT POLLUTION.**

Strongly Agree	152	83.06%
Agree	26	14.20%
Neutral	4	2.18%
Disagree	1	0.54%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Total: 183**

 **STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD PASS STRONG PENALTIES FOR COMPANIES THAT POLLUTE OR CAUSE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM.**

Yes	629	89.98%
Neutral/Maybe	46	6.58%
No	24	3.43%

**Total: 699**

 **I AM MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR A CANDIDATE WITH STRONG ENVIRONMENTAL POSITIONS.**

Strongly Agree	124	68.13%
Agree	50	27.47%
Neutral	7	3.84%
Disagree	1	0.54%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

**Total: 182**

## Community Voices:



**"If we want to mitigate climate change, we need strong leaders."**

- Filipino woman, Pittsburgh



**"I support strong laws that hold polluting corporations accountable for the harms they cause and for driving the climate crisis."**

- Japanese and Non-Asian woman, Philadelphia



**"Accountability / transparency around elected officials taking contributions from polluters."**

- Indian man, Allegheny County



**"Campaigns to encourage government officials to restore and pass laws to provide funding for those affected by environmental justice issues."**

- Korean and Non-Asian woman, Montgomery County



**"City and town commitments to zero carbon emissions."**

- Chinese and Taiwanese woman, Montgomery County



# Community Voices

Quotes throughout this report, and particularly in this section come from the two following open-ended questions in the online version of the survey. Other quotes came from the community listening sessions.

**What kind of green or sustainable investments would you like to see in your community?**

**Do you have any concerns about the environment that we have not asked that you'd like to share?**

**“The way we live puts a lot of stress on the environment. We can do better, each of us”**  
*- Filipino woman, Pittsburgh*



# Renewable Energy and Decarbonization:



**“More solar energy and programs to make affordable.”**

*- Chinese woman, Philadelphia*



**“City and town commitments to zero carbon emissions.”**

*- Chinese and Taiwanese woman, Montgomery County*



**“Solar power that's accessible.”**

*- Indonesian woman, Montgomery County*



**“Community-owned and controlled green energy sources.”**

*- Japanese and Non-Asian woman, Philadelphia*



**“Making solar energy more accessible and widely available would be great as well. There have been people who come to talk about solar energy in our neighborhood, but I think myself and others are skeptical of the reliability / trustworthiness of the source and whether the cost is legitimately as affordable and the energy is as reliable / high quality as they claim. I think there are fears of these companies / orgs being scammers, and there'd be more credibility or trust if the program was from the City of Philadelphia, State of PA, or federal gov.”**

*- Vietnamese woman, Philadelphia*



**“More renewable energy sources.”**

*- Taiwanese man, Allegheny County*



**“Ways to go fossil free for all communities.”**

*- Chinese and Khmer/Cambodian man, Dauphin County*

# Community Resources:



**“More green space, community gardens, and better public commons that help community members be healthier and happier.”**

*- Chinese and Laotian woman, Philadelphia*



**“I wonder how to build neighborly investment and care for our local environment.”**

*- Khmer/Cambodian man, Philadelphia*



**“Improved infrastructure (pave new sidewalks and fix hazardous ones to make the neighborhood more walkable).”**

*- Chinese woman, Montgomery County*



**“More community gardens, maybe even public compost bins? I think having more environmental/sustainability information and education provided for the community would be helpful. Especially as it relates to what we can collectivize and ask our building managers/landlords/realty companies to provide.”**

*- Filipino Nonbinary GNC, Philadelphia*



**“I would like to see less litter and dumping around Philadelphia. I would like investments in green spaces for everyone.”**

*- Laotian and Non-Asian woman, Philadelphia*



**“In my community I would love to see more light so people can get around safe. And small trees.”**

*- Burmese and Karen woman, Philadelphia*



**“I would like to see more open public space: parks, woodland and streams.”**

*- Chinese man, Montgomery County*



**“Better/more public transportation. Better environmental education in schools. Better education and support for people not to cut down trees. No toxic chemicals to kill roadside weeds. Native gardening education. Getting children into nature as part of curriculum.”**

*- Korean and Non-Asian woman, Montgomery County*



**“Investments that directly benefit and are accountable to community members (transit, community solar, park / tree improvements, etc).”**

*- Indian man, Allegheny County*



**"More affordable and easy to access electric car chargers."**

- Indian woman, Delaware County



**"Renewable energy, green spaces, funding for community gardens."**

- Korean and Non-Asian woman,  
Montgomery County



**"I know there are some neighborhood gardens in my neighborhood, so I'd love to see continued support for them."**

- Chinese and Taiwanese Nonbinary/GNC,  
Philadelphia



**"Investment in Indigenous land stewardship practices; more local community farms."**

- Japanese and Non-Asian woman,  
Philadelphia



**"Public community gardens, beautifying and expanding local parks, more trees, more public trash cans."**

- Taiwanese woman, Philadelphia



**"Tree and tree care, and heavy metal remediation. Community gardens, and green spaces."**

- Chinese, Other, Philadelphia



**"More trash cans, more tree coverage in neighborhoods, and there are a couple public parks in my area but they're just playgrounds and concrete - I'd love some grassy fields for kids to play in."**

- Thai Nonbinary/GNC, Philadelphia



**"Free composting options, investment in storm water management, resources for keeping neighborhoods clean."**

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



**"More public education and initiatives to support balanced climate in the cities. Loss of green space and natural environments and development projects that pollute (no turf in FDR meadows) are dangerous and diminish quality of life."**

- Chinese, Nonbinary/GNC, Philadelphia



**"More continuous protected bike lanes, especially along more trafficked roads (i.e. leading up to Vine St.). More tree cover where applicable, with continued maintenance. Available cooling centers during the summers."**

- Chinese Nonbinary/GNC Philadelphia



**"Free compost pickup. More rain trenches where street sewer drains back up."**

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



## Climate Action:



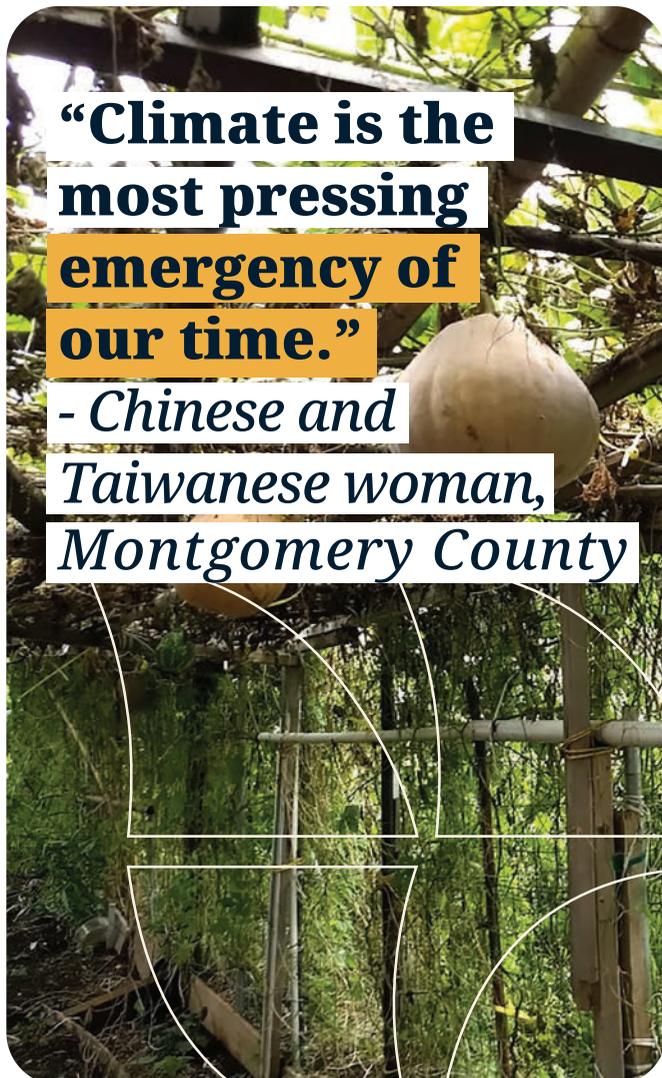
**"I am worried that state governments won't do enough towards slowing the climate disaster. I am horrified at the direction our country is taking when we need to be doing everything we can to address the climate crisis."**

*- Korean and Non-Asian woman, Montgomery County*



**"Climate change preparation."**

*- Korean, Nonbinary/GNC, Philadelphia*



**"Climate is the most pressing emergency of our time."**

*- Chinese and Taiwanese woman, Montgomery County*

## Public Transit:



**"Less cars, better public transportation."**

*- Chinese woman, Delaware County*



**"Increased frequency of public transit."**

*- Korean woman, Philadelphia*



**"More bike lanes and bus lanes."**

*- Indian man, Philadelphia*



**"Electrification of bus fleets / public transit."**

*- Chinese, Nonbinary/GNC, Philadelphia*



**"Improve bike safety so there are other ways to commute other than cars. Public transit safety can be improved."**

*- Chinese woman, Philadelphia*



**"I am really concerned about the SEPTA budget cuts and line cuts. Regional Rail lines like Paoli/Thorndale are crucial for me to get into the city."**

*- Chinese woman, Montgomery County*



**"Stronger public transportation, especially for those who cannot afford a car."**

*- Chinese and Laotian woman, Philadelphia*

## Concerns about Development and Gentrification:



**"Phasing out fossil fuels at the production and supply level. Carbon offsets or mandatory greenery with new development. No mandatory parking minimums, stop with the car first infrastructure that floods our city with pollution."**

*- Khmer/Cambodian man, Philadelphia*



**"Stop new developments for higher end housing - provide really affordable housing and repurpose/adapts/repair older buildings rather than demolish them."**

*- Chinese woman, Philadelphia*



**"I'd like to see more trees being planted to provide shade, especially in areas that have been developed for new-build housing. A lot of new housing is being built in flood areas but buyers aren't aware of the risks of the area. A lot of trees have been cut down to make way for housing developments, making shade scarce. A lot of HOAs prohibit trees which provide shade, increasing energy use in the heat and impact flood areas."**

*- Chinese woman, Lehigh County*



**"Toxic hazards from torn down buildings."**

*- Indian woman, Philadelphia*



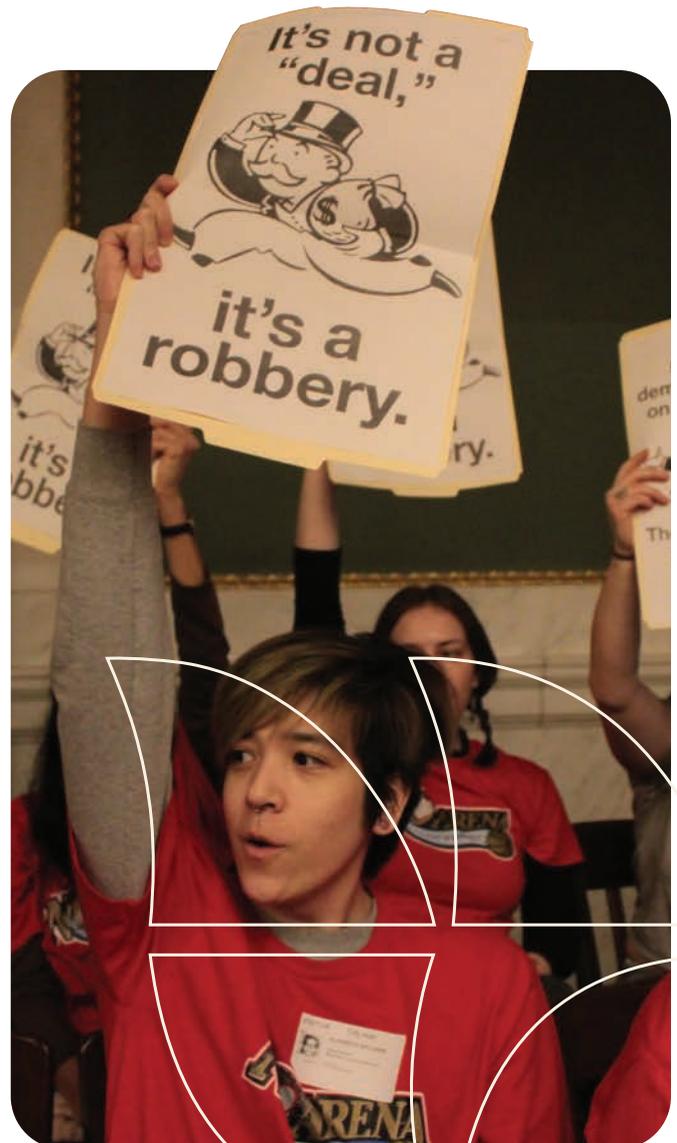
**"Issues with greenwashing, community distrust in sustainable and environmentally-friendly options that have been associated with or lead to gentrification."**

*- Nonbinary/GNC, Chinese, Philadelphia*



**"More air monitoring stations around construction sites."**

*- Chinese woman, Philadelphia*



# Workers Rights and Economic Opportunities:



**"Funding for green jobs accessible to previously incarcerated individuals and at risk teens."**

*- Chinese, Other, Philadelphia*



**"Impacts of long term exposure to excessive noise. Workplace environments of low wage workers."**

*- Chinese woman, Philadelphia*



**"Usually poor environmental protections also equate to poor labor protections and worker exploitation. I'd like to see more legislation for better worker's rights and more powerful entities to enforce those protections."**

*- Indonesian man, Philadelphia*



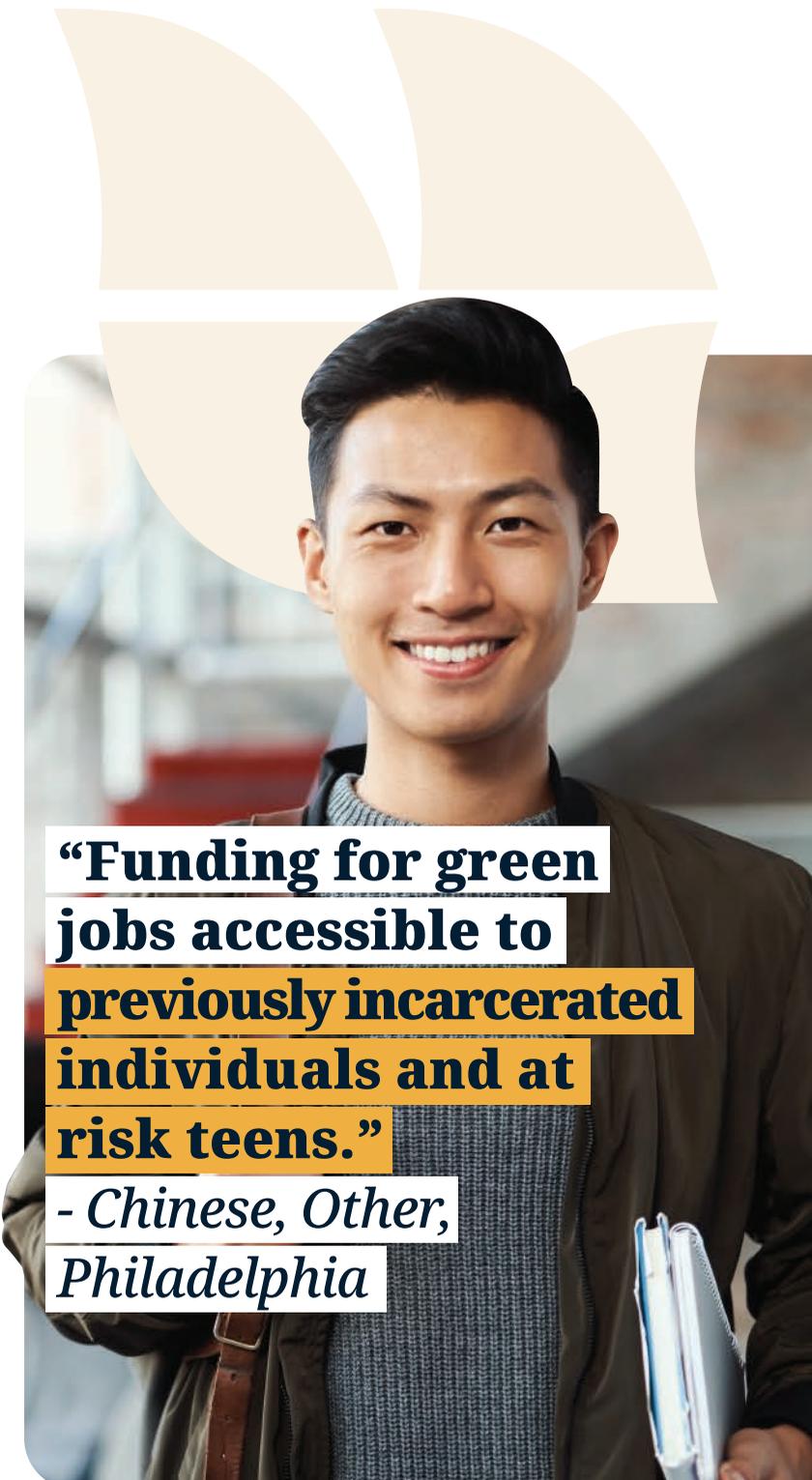
**"Building union support for green infrastructure projects (intentional collaboration with locals)."**

*- Indian man, Allegheny County*



**"Green jobs need to be good jobs. I would like to see government subsidies or tax abatement for clean economy come with requirement for card check neutrality at workplaces and no forced labor in the supply chain. (For example solar panel supply chain sometimes involves Uyghur forced labor.)"**

*- Taiwanese woman, Allegheny County*



**"Funding for green jobs accessible to previously incarcerated individuals and at risk teens."**

*- Chinese, Other, Philadelphia*

## Good Governance



**"Flood resiliency investment, particularly an increase in the amount of funding from FEMA to better support retrofit of existing structures for flood resilience."**

- Chinese man, Philadelphia



**"Fund EPA, watershed protection, clean water efforts, solar panel access for lower income households."**

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



**"Cuts to federal EPA endanger environmental laws and public protection."**

- Chinese woman, Delaware County

## Technology and the Environment:



**"Could be helpful to spread awareness about things like the negative impacts of AI on the environment."**

- Korean woman, Philadelphia



**"Energy consumption for AI."**

- Chinese woman, Philadelphia



# Environmental Justice Snapshots

Asian Americans have been involved in environmental justice fights from the beginning of the movement. Here we highlight three struggles in Philadelphia.

## KCAP: Looking for a Permanent Home

Since 2010, Karen refugees in Philadelphia have been moving from space to space, from one garden to another, trying to find permanent access to land to grow their heritage foods. “Everyone comes from a farming background,” Naw Doh, executive director of the Karen Community Association of Philadelphia (KCAP) told us, so being able to grow and access traditional foods is central to Karen culture. Doh highlighted this importance, speaking about an informal seed-sharing network across the United States that preserves and shares culturally important plants.

Community farming is also a tool to address food insecurity, as traditional produce is hard to find in Philadelphia for the Karen community, especially in places that accept EBT and SNAP benefits, which will be further pressured by rising food prices. KCAP recently acquired their own EBT machine, so they hope to be able to offer produce to the community this summer. The experiences of the Philadelphia Karen community reflects common issues with community farms and gardens in the city. As most growers don’t own their land, these important community spaces are at constant risk of being sold to developers. This instability has impacted the Karen farmers who have relocated many times over the past fifteen years. The “big dream” is to find a permanent home, Doh told us.



## No Arena Fight

In July 2022, the billionaire owners of the Philadelphia 76ers NBA team announced plans to build a new \$1.3 billion arena one block away from Philadelphia’s historic Chinatown. This was the latest attack on one of the oldest Chinatowns in the country. Dating back to 1870, it’s now the only working class neighborhood of color in Center City Philadelphia. Chinatown has stood defiant for over a century as the community has been chipped away block by block by exploitative land use decisions. Landmarks such as the Convention Center and the Vine Street Expressway were built at the expense of homes and businesses. In impact studies sponsored by the Sixers, it was concluded that, “The arena should be considered a significant potential risk to Chinatown’s core identity.”<sup>7</sup> The Center City zip code 19107, which includes Chinatown, has the worst particulate matter exposure in the city.

In a neighborhood with no public green space and limited tree cover split by a major highway, our community has been on the front lines fighting against the Vine Street Expressway, Convention Center, a federal prison, two casinos, a baseball stadium, and more. Now, the community pushes for an alternative vision of Market East that truly serves the needs of the neighborhood.

<sup>7</sup> Proposed 76ers Arena Community Impact Analysis, June 2024

## VietLead: Farm & Food Sovereignty

A grassroots organization serving Vietnamese and Southeast Asian communities in Philadelphia and South Jersey, VietLead was preparing to plant a community garden at Furness High School in South Philly in 2018 after a search for available land didn't result in any viable options. When lead was found in the garden area, students began a petition that turned into a citywide campaign for remediation and renovations in Philadelphia's aging schools. The students won \$130,000 from the Philadelphia School District to remediate the lead. Hundreds of students have worked on the Furness Community School Garden in the years since the cleanup. Furness High School has the highest Limited English Proficient student population in Philadelphia. Integrating the garden into the school curriculum has given students a learning space outside of the traditional classroom and parents with Limited English Proficiency an opportunity to be involved in the school community and their children's education.

The garden tried different food distribution models but found the most successful was letting people grow their own food. **"We know when our growers grow the food, they're distributing it within the community,"** Lan Dinh of VietLead told us. The Furness garden has been a wildly successful model in providing a true intergenerational space for the community, showing the healing power of food sovereignty and reclaiming our relationships with our native foods. **"The root in the garden is reclaiming our relationship to land to support greater self-awareness and community connection, and thus, political mobilization,"** Dinh said. **"When folks have that healing connection to land, it does something, it creates a shift in agency and cultural pride,"** and **"an idea of abundance,"** that we can have more.





## Looking Forward

We began this report reflecting on how we questioned ourselves during the process about the timing of this report when so much is going on. The data we have presented emphatically answers, yes. Our communities were excited to talk about ideas and solutions. More than once, respondents expressed their gratitude that they were being asked about the topics covered in the survey. We know that our communities care about the environment. We know our communities want action on climate and environmental justice.

There is a huge desire in our communities for more. We want more green spaces to be close to nature, to gather with our neighbors, to have safe places for our children to play. We want more from our elected officials, to hear our voices, to provide services, to help us take care of our communities. Our communities want trees, public transit, and affordable, renewable energy in affordable homes. We want polluters to be held accountable.

**Moving forward, this report will guide our work building power in communities to fight for the clean and healthy environments we want and deserve. We'll advocate for the policy recommendations listed in this report and build the community resilience that has held our communities together. We know that our communities feel a deep connection to nature and a desire for environmental and climate justice for our own well-being and to put into practice the world we want to see.**



# About



The Asian American Community Fund of PA celebrates and empowers Asian American communities across Pennsylvania. We bring our communities together across generations to share our histories, traditions, and resources. We educate and empower our communities, support local Asian American associations and organizations, and serve current and future generations through civic engagement that ensures Pennsylvania is a safe and welcoming home for all of our communities.

# Acknowledgements

**The Asian American Community Fund of PA team would like to thank our community partners, including the AAPI PA Power Caucus for their trust in us and this work.**

We are incredibly grateful to our organizers and volunteers who collected the data in this report. With immense gratitude, we thank the 938 participants of the survey who shared their thoughts, opinions, values, and lived experiences in the survey and listening sessions.

We are grateful to our community for their openness and trust.

Finally, it's impossible to present a report about environmental justice without acknowledging the original and ongoing stewards of the land known as Pennsylvania: the Lenni Lenape, Munsee Delaware, Erie, Iroquois, Shawnee, and Susquehannock tribes, who were all forcibly removed from their homeland and currently have no state recognition from the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We celebrate water and land defenders around the world who are the frontlines of climate defense and environmental resilience. We know that Land Back and other decolonial movements are essential to environmental justice and liberation.





The physical threat posed by climate change represents a crisis that is not only material but also profoundly spiritual at its core because it challenges us to think seriously about the future of the human race and what it means to be a human being.



- Grace Lee Boggs



Asian American  
Community Fund  
of Pennsylvania