

If You Make a Mess, Clean it Up!

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In May, 2024, New York Governor Kathy Hochul gathered with a diverse international group of researchers, faith leaders, policymakers, and government officials for the Vatican summit entitled [From Climate Crisis to Climate Resilience](#). Pope Francis presided over this summit which led to this [resilience protocol](#).

Perhaps that gathering affected Governor Hochul, because on December 26, 2024, she signed the [Climate Change Superfund Act](#) into law. This law establishes the climate change adaptation cost recovery program by assessing the most egregious of polluters. New York will benefit by receiving \$3 billion per year for 25 years, a \$75B total. One third of that fund is earmarked for vulnerable communities. This law is based on the concept employed by the federal [Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act \(CERCLA\) of 1980](#) which required responsible parties to clean up or pay damages for contaminated toxic waste sites. Expressed a little more succinctly, the principle which applies is this: [if you make a mess, you clean it up](#).

Funds gained from this law will take some of the pressure off taxpayers to support community resilience through flood protection, heat response and infrastructure upgrades. This funding will protect our subway stations from flooding, strengthen our power grid, and create cooling centers in vulnerable neighborhoods. Last year alone, New Yorkers paid \$2.2 billion in climate disaster costs. Now, polluters will help foot the bill.

The significance of New York's Climate Change Superfund Act becoming law is not lost on climate activists throughout the United States. These activists have been working on similar bills in other states as well as the federal [Polluters Pay Climate Fund Act](#). On July 1, 2024, Vermont's [Climate Superfund Cost Recovery Program](#) went into effect. Similar bills based on the *polluter pays* principle have been introduced in the states of California, Maryland, Massachusetts and New Jersey. In a virtual gathering a few days after the signing, NY Senate sponsor of the bill, Senator Liz

Krueger, suggested that now that New York's Climate Change Superfund Act has been signed, additional states will be introducing similar bills, as well.

In order to assist other states in moving forward similar legislation, [the New York Public Interest Research Group](#), which led the coalition that worked on New York's Climate Change Superfund Act, will offer a webinar reviewing the strategy and process used to pass the bill and then obtain Governor Kathy Hochul's signature on it. The time and date of that webinar have yet to be determined. However, if you would be interested in attending, please contact cdarcy@sistersofmercy.org.