**Assembly Budget Hearings**

**March 29, 2023**

Good afternoon Chair Marin, Vice-chair Wimberly, Committee members. Thank you for taking my testimony.

My name is Peggy Middaugh, and I represent Unitarian Universalist Faith Action NJ, a faith-based organization that coordinates grassroots social justice advocacy with our 20 member congregations, and individual Unitarian Universalists and allies across the state. While we speak on behalf of all people and living things in New Jersey we are especially concerned for the almost 3 million residents living in overburdened communities, as well as the forests, waters, and living ecological systems that we all depend on in our daily lives.

According to the recently released UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report, *“Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe*”. We’re feeling the effects right here in New Jersey, from flooding to heat waves, more intense storms, and many other biological and physical impacts. We support Governor Murphy’s goal of 100% renewable energy by 2035, and suggest the following four funding priorities in the budget we are reviewing today to help New Jersey build a strong and just society.

1. *Funding for clean, renewable energy sources* – solar, wind, thermal, and most especially energy conservation. The Clean Energy Fund must remain in-tact, and not be raided, as has been the case in previous years, to make up for shortfalls in other parts of the state budget. Rapidly growing clean energy jobs throughout the State will help restructure our economy in a way that is safe, healthy and vibrant for both NJ residents and ecosystems.
2. *New Jersey Transit must have its own dedicated source of funding*, as is the case with many other transit agencies throughout the country. Over 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in NJ come from the transportation sector. We must move away from a car-centric commuter culture and encourage more people to live and work locally, and travel easily, comfortably and safely on public transportation.
3. *Adequate funding for education, marketing and development of organic products.* The Organic Farming Board established through legislation last year will lead to healthy food and soil rich in nutrients which will sequester significant amounts of carbon.
4. *Funding should be provided to NJDEP to address the impacts of invasive, non-native species including insects, animals, plants and pathogens that have such a devastating impact on our public forests.* Our mature forests must be recognized and vigilantly protected for the significant clean air and climate benefits they provide through carbon sequestration and other means.