

**Testimony of Rachel Vassar, Philadelphia Outreach Coordinator for Citizens for Pennsylvania's  
Future (PennFuture)**

**To**

**Philadelphia City Council Committee on the Environment**

**December 2, 2009**

Good afternoon, my name is Rachel Vassar and I am the Philadelphia Outreach Coordinator for Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture). PennFuture works to create a just future where nature, communities and the economy thrive. We enforce environmental laws and advocate for the transformation of public policy, public opinion and the marketplace to restore and protect the environment and safeguard public health. In line with our mission, PennFuture works as the lead organization behind The Next Great City initiative, which is dedicated to creating a positive future for Philadelphia by advocating for common sense, cost effective policies that enhance environmental quality, strengthen neighborhoods and increase our economic competitiveness.

Made up of civic associations, labor groups, public health organizations, environmental nonprofits, and faith-based communities, the Next Great City initiative came together in the fall of 2005 to address the environmental and public health issues that are harming Philadelphia's economy and quality of life. This diverse coalition identified ten affordable actions that the city could undertake to revitalize Philadelphia's neighborhoods. These actions have the broad support of the constituents of the 122 organizations that make up the Next Great City coalition.

Among the ten agenda items is a recommendation that Philadelphia build energy-efficient, healthy city and school-district facilities. We call on the city to follow the lead of the cities and states throughout the country, as well as the federal government, that require new buildings to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

In the 2009 fiscal year, the combined energy bills of General Fund departments - not including street lighting, Aviation or the Water Department - were approximately \$38Million. Rising energy prices and budget deficits at the city and state level make it more important than ever for the city to take control of its energy spending by practicing greater energy efficiency. Buildings are a vital component of this strategy. In order for the city to better meet its many budgetary priorities now and in the future, new city facilities and retrofits of existing buildings must use energy as efficiently as possible. Any upfront costs associated with constructing city facilities to LEED

standards would be offset many times over by energy and water savings garnered over the life of the building<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to saving money on energy bills, requiring city buildings to meet LEED standards, will help to meet a number of Greenworks goals, and bringing us one step closer to being the greenest city in America. LEED requirements will better equip the city's workforce to compete in the green economy by providing opportunities for workers to learn state-of-the-art construction practices. Buildings built to LEED standards will also decrease the burden on our aging sewer system, and it will improve air quality and cut greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the need for electricity derived from fossil fuels and coal.

I urge the Philadelphia City Council Committee on the Environment to give its full support to Bill No. 080025 amending Chapter 17-100 of The Philadelphia Code to require certain publicly-funded construction projects that fall under the City's control to obtain a LEED silver level rating. This legislation is the right thing to do for our communities, our economy, and our environment. It exemplifies the long-term vision that Philadelphia needs to make us the Next Great City with a sustainable future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> "A National Review of Green Schools: Costs, Benefits, and Implications for Massachusetts" analyzed 30 green school buildings across the nation and found that green schools cost only 1.5 to 2.5% more than conventional buildings to construct and saved ten times that much. "A National Review of Green Schools: Costs, Benefits, and Implications for Massachusetts, a Report for the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative" (December 2005)