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CONTACT:

Maya van Rossum, Founder of Green Amendments For The Generations and the Delaware Riverkeeper, (215) 801-3043, maya@forthegenerations.org

Second Annual Green Amendment Day Tackles Environmental Injustice Through Collective Action

Yesterday, over one hundred environmental advocates from 23 states across the country gathered virtually to celebrate the Second Annual Green Amendment Day. Entitled “Green Amendments: Transforming Environmental Rights from Rhetoric to Reality,” programming aimed to shine a light on how enforceable environmental rights, in the form of constitutional Green Amendments, can help frontline communities’ address toxic pollution, environmental racism, climate injustice, and air and water pollution harming their communities. According to Green Amendments For The Generations, the organizer of this national day of recognition and action, the goal of the day’s activities was to promote the value of securing constitutional protection for the inalienable right to a clean and healthy environment in all fifty states through passage of Green Amendments, constitutional environmental rights amendments that recognize and protect the rights of all people to pure water, clean air, a stable climate, and healthy environments.

Events included a welcome speech from Green Amendment Author and Founder Maya van Rossum, online action opportunities, prize giveaways, and a virtual panel discussion featuring stories of environmental harm and injustice from multiple communities nationwide. These stories were analyzed by leading advocacy and legal experts, who discussed the ways in which Green Amendments could make a meaningful difference in combating their issues on the ground. In the spirit of yesterday’s celebration, activists from a dozen states wrote letters to their state governors and to their local newspaper editors, rallying to support Green Amendment efforts in their state.

Maya van Rossum, leader of the watershed-based advocacy organization the Delaware Riverkeeper Network, founded the national movement and non-profit Green Amendments For The Generations in 2017 after winning the landmark case *Robinson Township, Delaware Riverkeeper Network, et. al. v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (2013), which breathed new life into Pennsylvania’s long ignored environmental rights amendment. Through advocating for the passage of Green Amendments in all fifty states and ultimately at the federal level, van Rossum aims to make states the trustee of their natural resources for all residents, invoking a constitutional obligation to uphold environmental rights while holding governmental leaders accountable for acts of environmental and climate injustice committed in their state. As of July of 2022, there are 3 states where Green Amendments have been passed into law, 12 states with advancing Green Amendment efforts across the country, and growing interest from a handful of additional states. Most recently, New York passed its statewide Green Amendment in November of 2021.

Numerous environmental activists, community organizers, and legal experts all illustrated the benefits of passing a Green Amendment in their state:

“Given the recent Supreme Court decision limiting the ability of government to act on environmental protection, and confirming that only rights explicitly recognized in the constitution will be given judicial viability, the passage of Green Amendments is now more crucial than ever before,” said **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and Founder of Green Amendments For The Generations**, “Our highest court has made their decision, choosing to severely restrict the power of the EPA and the federal government to take meaningful action against the climate crisis. A Green Amendment provides a concrete way for states to tackle issues of climate and environmental injustice as it adds the right to a clean environment and a stable climate into that state’s constitution, ultimately paving the way for statewide solution-making and the passage of a federal Green Amendment.”

"The importance of a Green Amendment can't be overstated," noted **Eric Jantz, Senior Staff Attorney with the New Mexico Environmental Law Center**, “a constitutional amendment protecting our right to a clean and healthy environment is a fundamental shift in power dynamics. Green Amendments put the power of environmental and public health decision-making back where it belongs - in the hands of the people, rather than leaving those decisions to the discretion of bureaucrats with no stake in the outcome.”

“Clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment are critical for a healthy economy and the health of our families,” added **Kerri Evelyn Harris with the MidAtlantic Justice Coalition**. “The Green Amendment is vital to ensuring our natural resources are protected for the families, farmers, and businesses of today and tomorrow.”

Terrance Bankston, New Jersey Environmental Justice organizer with Clean Water Action, stated, “The NJ Green Amendment, as it relates to environmental justice, perpetuates both insurance and accountability at every level. For Blacks and Latinx, we are at the crossroads of crisis and opportunity. Our complexion deserves protection regardless of our area or zip codes.”

“Communities work tirelessly to protect people and the environment from pollution, industrial domination, and bad government decisions. Often it is the failure of the very agencies charged with protecting our water, air and climate that make our struggles the hardest. The power of the Green Amendment is that it ensures that these goals are recognized as inalienable rights and provides us with a more powerful platform to insist that government must do its job and ensure that special interests who put their profits over people won’t have free reign, like they do today,” said **Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network**.

"States have really mobilized behind the Green Amendment movement," noted **Dylan McDowell, Acting Executive Director of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators**, “Since 1970, when Montana and Pennsylvania were the only states to have passed Green Amendments, there are now over a dozen that have introduced or plan to introduce legislation this session to ensure the right to a healthy environment for their citizens. In November, New York became the third state to pass a Green Amendment by a decisive voter margin. NCEL is excited to see continued momentum at the state level on this effort.”

Robert Meek, Chair of the Board of Directors of Green Amendments For The Generations, stated, “In light of the Supreme Court's decision in *West Virginia v. EPA*, eviscerating the EPA's power to regulate climate change, it is abundantly clear that the states must take action to protect our environment and be proactive in addressing the climate crisis. The current federal environmental regulatory system is a hodge-podge of rules that are difficult to enforce effectively. However, there is an alternative --- pass constitutional Green Amendments that will recognize the environmental, climate, and environmental justice rights of all people in their state. State passage of a constitutional Green Amendment – particularly one explicitly recognizing rights to a stable climate – can help fill the gaps in federal law and provide the clearest possible signal to our courts that climate change must be checked and our rights to a clean and stable environment are worthy of fundamental constitutional protection.”

For additional information about the day and our speakers, please visit:

<https://bit.ly/GADay22Info>

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